In Love's Domains

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In Love's Domains

A Trilogy

by Marah Ellis Ryan

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IN LOVE'S DOMAINS.

PROLOGUE.

"A drop of dew may drag a deluge down!" It was Meredith's Clytemnestra who said that, was it not? A wise woman, who all her life sought out the sunny places, and let the deluges fall on other heads.

And it was the Professor who drew down the deluge of ink for himself, his young friend the Poet, and his old friend the Bohemian, that evening, when he twisted his wig awry in an impatient manner and growled:

"No chance of Harvey dropping in to-night. He's too much infatuated with that best girl of his; vowed yesterday he'd marry her or commit suicide before New Year's. He's a fool."

The two younger men glanced at each other in an amused way. The irascibility of their honored chum was seldom annoying to either, and the elder of the two reached for a second bunch of grapes as he asked: "Because he is in love, or because he wants to marry, which?"

"Both. He has the making of a clever man in

him if he don't tie himself down to humoring one woman's whims and complicated emotions."

"I am afraid you are growing immoral, Professor," retorted the Bohemian, "why that objection to the sex singular? You wouldn't have him humor the emotions of a harem, would you? Remember, he is a good boy."

"Why should they not marry if they love?" asked the third party at the dinner table, a warm-eyed fellow of twenty-four. A young poet dreaming over his first book of verse. A young actor as well, he was, who had played in the country places, and carried from them a breath of wholesome intensity for his stage work; a breath of freshness and purity for his poems that all the din and life of the streets could not scatter. "Why not, if he loves her?" he repeated.

"All the more reason, since the deeper his delusion the greater shock its awakening will be."

"Then you think there is always a process of disillusion to go through? A fall from ideals to mourn over in the married state?" asked the Bohemian.

"Yes. The infatuation of love admits no deficiencies, therefore the dishonesty of its foundation makes it always a shaky affair. Take from love its glamour, strip it of its illusions, have it unsheltered by all that mistiness of the imagination, and it melts into mere animal magnetism as surely as that the hardest of ice and the dryest of dust make mud. It's kittle-kattle that same love;

leave it alone;" and he swallowed his sherry at a gulp, as if he had swallowed the subject and disposed of it.

"Well, Professor," answered the Poet, "you must agree that for a misty, intangible illusion, it has been the inspiration of more great work, more noble deeds, than any other one passion or emotion."

"Yes, and the heroes of those deeds would ten years later look back on that phase of their existence and think, 'what a jackass I was to be so impressionable.' Oh! affection between the sexes and marriage rites are good things, the latter protects society, you know. I once contemplated it myself. Oh, yes, I've been there. But it's the mushiness of the twaddle about the divinity of love that I object to. It won't wash. A doctor is much like a priest in his knowledge of the domestic lives of others, and I tell you we manage to see the clay feet under many a cloak of ideality."

"What do you think of it, Alan?" asked the younger man. "Do you believe in the continued existence of its happiness in a spiritual sense, or are you too much of the earth—earthy, for that view of the question?"

"Am I?" he half questioned himself, with an introspective look in the blue eyes that came so near being black. "Am I of the earth—earthy? Not too much so to believe in love's continued existence as the highest help a soul can have to earthly happiness, if it is firmly founded on morality's laws."

"Morality!" grunted the Professor. "If love is the divine thing you imagine, it should be affected by nothing of social forms. And, by the way, Alan, whence comes your late knowledge of the key to happiness through morality?"

"By the help of one of the sex of my mother?" he answered, quietly. And the tone some way stilled any reply from the others; there was in it a hint of something in the Bohemian's nature that suggested an unexplored country—one his club friends had not suspected. The silence after his speech had grown a little marked, a trifle awkward, and, noticing it, he continued in lighter vein: "But don't you think you are a bit hard on a fellow with your insinuations as to late morality? I haven't been such a very black sheep."

"Perhaps not," said the Professor, doubtfully, "but—well, my boy, they tell me you've been very human."

"Why not? Our humanity is our greatest strength. People who are virtuous simply through the weakness of their human passions deserve no credit."

"Spoken like a nineteenth century disciple of Sense!" said a voice at the *portières*, and Harvey, the deserter, entered in evening dress, a Cape jasmine in his buttonhole helping to make him altogether lovely with fragrance. The Professor noticed these details grumpily and suspiciously. Harvey was thirty-five, a clever business man, one of a publishing firm, and his character was weak-

ened in the old bachelor's eyes by his tendency to love affairs.

"Sense seems scarcely the word after Alan's first statement," demurred the Poet, taking up the cudgels for his friend. "At least, not in the general acceptance of the term—not as it approaches the sensual. The sensuous? Yes, all poetry, in life or verse, the outgrowth of love and of religion, is full of the sensuous; and human love, after all, must be but the religion of the heart."

"It is a religion, then, in which you pin your faith to a transitory idol," answered the Professor; "one you can set up to worship through like any South Sea Islander, and carve out a new one when association shows you how much too big its ears or its nose may be for your idea of divine beauty. The divinity of the emotion you extol can only be kept alive through the filter of the senses. The highest of your transports can not rise above the earthiness in you. I tell you those idealistic views of yours have no practical foundation. We don't get our wings until the next world."

"A forcible argument," murmured Harvey, in evident admiration. "I am sorry I can not spend the evening with you. Your subject is a fascinating one to my susceptible nature—but duties! I am a martyr to duty. So you"—to the Poet—"look on it as a religion, do you? Well, you are but twenty-four, and not long away from the freshness of your northern hills; and you"—to the Professor—"look on it as an evanescent emotion

that takes coloring entirely from the senses—a thing that does not endure. Well, you have been buried in anatomical researches for years—shut up in a country college with only a season's breathing space when you come to see how we sinners live—so, you may be excused your cynicism, as love is likely to fight shy of your dissecting knife; and you"—turning to the Bohemian — "you have known love closely enough to create one of the most lovable of creatures in that last play of yours. It is an undeniable success. But what are your views of it as relating to the continued existence of happiness through it in human lives?"

"I think it capable of producing all that is most high, most divine, in a soul sense. It has in it all possibilities of heaven, and of hell, and, as I said before, to my mind the heaven of it can be endless only through temperance and morality."

"You mean when two people love each other?"

"Yes; a love that is unrequited may exalt to high work in an ideal sense, if the object is morally and mentally high as your ideals. But it gives no such perfection as the mutual rendering up of lives to each other."

"Come down from the clouds, Alan," growled the Professor; "what has driven the pair of you up there in such beastly weather? Listen to that rain pouring down, Harvey. You're not such a fool as to take a girl out to the theatre to-night?"

"I certainly am," answered Harvey, unruffled by the gruffness; "you see, I might get a chance

to carry her from the door to the carriage. It would never do to have her feet wet. No," he said, ruminatingly, "I could not risk missing so much of heaven;" and then he added, more briskly:

"Look here, I believe I have a sort of genius for laying plans for other people's work. Those ideas of yours have promoted one in my head. Our firm want something original in short sketches for our holiday issue. Now, you are all writers; all in different directions; suppose you each, with your ideas of this question, write me a love story to prove your theories. If they are acceptable, I will have them issued in one volume and pay you a good rate for the work. What do you say?"

"It would be a novel idea," said the Bohemian, slowly; "but I have not done anything in that line for a long time, and am not sure I am equal to fiction."

"Then write facts," said the Professor, sarcastically; "surely some of your experiences will furnish you material, and you have much more business than I in love's domains."

"In Love's Domains," echoed the Poet, "there is a title ready-made for you, Mr. Harvey."

"You are right," the publisher answered; "that's a good idea and suggestive. Oh, you have something in that head of yours besides rhymes, I shall expect something creditable from you."

"Expect nothing striking," he answered, "I am equal only to quietly-toned work."

"No, he don't let his feet touch earth often enough to reach the dramatic in construction,"—this from the Professor.

"Give him ten years more and he will," answered Harvey; "well what do you say, Alan, will you try it?"

"Yes, I will," said the Bohemian, "that is, I will make no promises as to giving it to you for the public. I am not sure enough of myself. But I will attempt a story with that idea in view."

"All right, then, it's settled. Get them written soon as you can. I must go now, it is getting late. Professor, you haven't said a word, but I know you'll do it, and I should not wonder if you wrote the spooniest story of the three."

"I'll write you a treatise on the anatomical construction of the form divine, and give it to you as a sinker to hold down my ethereal companions," growled the Professor, incited anew into grumpiness by the sight of Harvey before a pier-glass, straightening his tie, giving his mustache a final twirl, and admiring himself generally before sallying forth to conquest. "Oh no, you won't," he said, amiably, turning his back on them, and smiling at them in the mirror, "you will burnish up your reminiscences and give us something thrilling. By the way, Professor," picking up his hat and coat, "how long has it been since you kissed a pair of red lips? I imagine they would have a wonderful effect on your imagination for the subject. Don't look so horrified. I

would prescribe no medicine for you that I would not cheerfully take myself. Good night, gentlemen. I'll be in to see you to-morrow, Alan," and, smiling at the Professor's half-amused, half-frowning face, he sauntered out of the club-rooms and down to the carriage awaiting himself and the fair freight with whom he was to share the delights of the theatre.

"Froth! froth!" ejaculated the Professor, "I have known that fellow ever since he left the nursery. He has proven successful in business, but I'm blessed if it is not the only way one has of knowing whether that froth means cream or scum.'

That night the mind of each was filled with the germ of a story that was to be. The Poet, alone in his room, listening to the soft fall of the rain in the autumn night, half fancied it the rustle of leaves whispering of the sadness of the woods left naked, and among the visionary network of bare boughs nipped by the frost there arose a woman's face, as he had seen it once—an old face, brown and withered as dead leaves of autumn, with a quaint pathos of eye and speech that had haunted him through many days. And when he slept that night, he had decided to give to the world her love story.

The Professor shuffled away to his room early, drew the curtains close, lit every gas-jet, poked the fire in the open grate until it got too sulky to burn for him, and, with his slippers on, he leaned back luxuriously to rest, and then—

"A love story," he said, contemptuously, "I never knew but one, and I doubt if I have much imagination. Let me see, let—me—see. What was that idea I had coming up the stairs? Yes, yes, to be sure; they must be in that old box."

And a little later he was down on his knees beside a trunk, out of which he lifted things in orderly fashion until he found an old tin box containing some old law papers, old receipts for money paid, the deeds to some property, and finally, an old daguerreotype case, out of which something dropped as he opened it.

"Uh-hm!" he grunted, getting stiffly up from his knees, and studying the face under the gaslight. "That's it; that's Lettie. Pretty girl she was—prettier than the most of them. I wonder what that was that dropped? Don't think I've looked at that picture for twenty years."

He hunted around in the box and found the thing that had dropped. It was a bunch of immortelles, almost unrecognizable from age. They were pressed flat, and tied with a narrow pink ribbon with a fancy edge that had been apple green, but was now almost gray.

"Lord bless me! Lord bless my soul! I'd forgotten all about them. Well, well, how one's memory does go! But this brings much of it back—yes, considerable. How musty they do smell! And the moths have got at the velvet of that case—a pretty case it was, too. Bah! I don't like the smell of them. Tobacco is a better

companion." And he pushed them aside and lit a pipe.

"Ah! that's better!" — with a long sigh of enjoyment. Then he looked at the musty old mementoes and smiled grimly, sent a great puff of smoke toward them, and laughed a little sarcastically as they were almost hidden in the cloud.

So he sat, and grimaced, and smoked, and dreamed, until drowsiness dropped around him. The pipe went out, the fire burned low, and at last he awoke with a start, shuffled out of his clothes and into bed, forgetful of the love tokens on the table at his elbow.

But in the room of the man called Alan the light burned long, though not very brightly, that night, and a book of his own, published two years before, was opened and looked at long and thoughtfully—a volume beautifully illustrated, that he kept always near him. All through it were passages marked in a hand that was likely a woman's; and on the blank leaf was a pen sketch, as delicately done as an etching—a sketch at sight of which his eyes grew misty and his face dropped low and lower, until his lips touched a name written in the corner. The sketch was of a child's grave, white with anemones, on which a ray of moonlight fell as it struggled through the branches above. Two figures were dimly outlined in the dusky background, each moving away from the grave and from each other. Not their faces, only their forms could be seen—those of a man

and a woman. Long he looked, and then dropped on his knees at the bedside, the book making a pillow for his head—open as it was at the child's grave.

And thus the night closed in for him.

THE LADY OF THE GARDEN.

THE POET'S STORY.

Nae better wifie there lived on the lea
Than bonnie sweet Bessie, the maid o' Dundee."

Only a Scotch tongue could linger so lovingly over the words of the quaint old song, and the stalwart singer, striding back and forth with hands deep in pockets, softened his tones to a caress as they breathed of Bonnie Bessie.

Not altogether a scene to inspire a singer was that railroad junction, where a party was congregated waiting for the next train—not a station-house, or even a telegraph office—only two railroads crossing, and a pile of trunks with labels of "Hotel" and "Theatre" painted on the ends of them.

"Three hours to wait," grumbled the melancholy-looking comedian of the party as he watched the "boys" arranging some trunks to make seats for the ladies; "three hours to wait, and only an hour's ride to Louisville, no depot, and the air chilly after that frost; every one is likely to catch cold and be hoarse as a fog-horn to-night. All the fault of the management."

"Nonsense!" broke in the decided tones of a

young lady in a gray ulster and a Tam o' Shanter traveling cap. "The management can't change the schedules or regulate the weather, and it was worth losing three hours of sleep this morning just to see the sun rise over those wild Kentucky hills. Now quit grumbling and take that child from your wife; she looks tired out. Why, man, five years ago you would not have let her bear the burden of a traveling satchel, no matter how small, and now you let that cherubic cub maul the life half out of her; go along, now!" and with a little push she started him toward the cherub from the mouth of which there issued music not at all celestial.

"You will get yourself into trouble some day with that authoritative manner of yours, my lady," remarked the singer, who had stopped beside her, and was looking down smilingly into the independent face.

"Oh, yes!" and the head crowned by the Tam o' Shanter was raised a trifle higher. "I know we jar on your delicate sensibilities often, we American women."

"Not at all. I find many of you charming.'

"*Many* of us!" she flashed back. "That sounds dubious. Well, there is safety in numbers. But I doubt if the many have succeeded in winning you from the ideal Scotch lassie of your Highlands, or is there something more substantial than an ideal? Yes?"—as a slight wave of color crept up to his eyes under her glance—"come, tell me of her. Is she a bonnie lassie?"

"She is to me," he answered, sending little rings of smoke from a cigar up into the chill October air. There was no smile in the keen blue eyes as they gazed over her head into the distant haze of the Indian summer.

"So!" and she laid her hand on his arm for an instant and then dropped it, laughing a little. "So it is serious, this affair of the heart. Women are always interested in love stories; tell me, what is she like, this bonnie lassie of yours!"

"An honest, earnest-hearted girl, that is all."

"And not at all an aggressive personage like our decided Americans—not at all like us?"

"Not at all like you," he said, half jestingly, as they walked slowly down the track, away from the rest of the party.

"Of course not; that goes without saying."

"Now, now, don't be sarcastic, for I can't quarrel with you when you wear that Scotch cap; so be good to-day."

"Pale-blooded, meek, and prayerful," she quoted laughingly, "would that bring me nearer the level of your Scottish maids? I fear not; they live a different life from ours; they are cared for carefully in the homes of their fathers with all the associations of sturdy, clean-limbed virtues; with all the legends of chivalry and purity as a background for the picture of their own lives, the picture that is tinged always with the warm glow of the ingle nook. We have not the same homes in America. We are too new, too much of a migratory class; we consider our-

selves a full century ahead of the quiet lives of your women, and yet I do not wonder if we lose by comparison in the eyes of a man who would want his wife akin to what his mother had been."

They walked on in silence for a little way and then he said:

"Don't you think you are inclined to be severe to-day? I have seen many happy home circles in your country, though they may lack the flavor of traditional surroundings. But home is where the heart is, always."

"But one's heart is not always in the same place," she said, with a little touch of daring. "Many of them change their address without warning and often leave their rent unpaid."

She stopped by the side of the country road they had reached, and, gathering some scarlet maple-leaves, pinned them to her gray coat, where they glowed like a live coal on a bed of dead ashes, while he stood aside and watched her a little curiously before he spoke.

"Why will you be so cynical?" he inquired at last. "You do not believe there is so little constancy in the world. It is bad enough to hear men express themselves so, but it jars on one to hear it from the lips of a woman, and a young woman."

"Young!" she repeated a little bitterly, "don't you think there are some people born old? I can scarcely remember the time when I did not feel so."

"Come, come, don't imagine yourself a female

Timon. Our century is fond of such fancies, but they have their foundation in morbid imaginations, and are unhealthy, and I will wager that close under the key of those non-committal lips of yours, there is some idyl that all your cynicism can not kill—something that gives the denial to your assertion of the ingrained inconstancy of humanity."

She looked up inquiringly. "You mean some personal affair—a love story?"

"Something of that sort, yes."

Her laugh broke out clearly on the still air as she stopped, thrusting her hands deep into the pockets of her coat, and facing him.

"Pardon my laughing," she begged, contritely, with an amused look still in her eyes, "but you seem determined that every one else must be ridiculous—that is, in love, because you happen to be. An idyl of the past? lots of them, my friend. My first love affair occurred when I was about five. I remember still the object of my affections. He had red hair, and a very much freckled nose, but I thought him most charming, especially his timidity, for he was mortally afraid of me, and would squirm uneasily under my glance, and dodge out of my way if he saw me moving toward him."

"Unappreciative youngster! why was I not there?" soliloquized her companion, throwing his light overcoat cloak-wise across his shoulders, and looking a deal more picturesque than with his arms in the sleeves, as the tailor intended.

"Because you were, no doubt, beginning a series of the same lessons among your beloved Scottish hills," answered the girl. "Well, that was my first love affair, though not the last. I have been in love with some one ever since, and very much in earnest with several subjects whose names I have forgotten."

"Pardon me, but I don't believe you, and I don't want to believe you," he answered, decidedly.

"Because I belong to the same sex as your heather-bell, your ideal of constancy? Why, my friend, I am only preparing you for the letter that will flit across the water some of these days, telling you that some other laddie has won your prize, and that she is 'woo'd and married and a'.'"

"Don't try to be so ill-natured," he said, good-humoredly, "it is really not your forte, though you have been trying yourself to-day. You know if any one else should accuse your sex of inconstancy, you would be the first to take up the cudgels in defense."

"I might be swinging them from the dark ages until eternity then," she retorted, "for the writers of all time have sung the same song, and is it not Parton who said, 'A woman's heart is like the moon, it is always changing, but there is always a man in it?'"

"I cry, enough," he admitted, laughingly. "If you begin to lanch quotations at me I give in and beat a retreat back to the Junction."

"No you don't," and she placed herself in the center of the road as a barricade. "I refuse to return to the grumbling back there, and you can't be so ungallant as to leave me here alone. I will promise to be good, to say no more to shake your faith in the sex divine."

"On that condition we will take a walk," he said, briskly, "so come along;" and forging ahead they followed the road that curved around a low hill back of which a few houses clustered sociably, and from the windows of which there looked questioning faces at the two pedestrians who were so unlike any of their neighbors, he with the assurance of the man of the world in his erect carriage that bespoke a past military training in far Aberdeen, she with the jauntiness of a New York tailor in her gray cloth suit, and the independence of a self-made woman in her level-looking eyes, that placidly met those directed to her and smiled them down serenely.

Occasionally she would glance quizzically at her companion as he strode on in silence, with a little wrinkle between the straight dark brows that had a trick of growing straighter under anger or perplexity. Which was it that changed their lines now, she wondered; so she looked at the strong young face with a half regret at trying to upset his illusions. The spirit of perversity had been strong in her, yet she would have felt sorry, more than sorry, if her predictions had come true; if his Scotch lassie had wavered in her allegiance.

"I should feel like shaking her if she did," she thought viciously, for she was honestly fond of the earnest-natured actor with whom she had played week after week through the theatrical season—fond of him with a sort of gay *camaraderie* that abolished conventionalities, that called him "Aberdeen," ignoring entirely the name given by his sponsors, that demolished with her practical comments its idealism that made itself manifest in the deep eyes and breadth of brow, that often contradicted her own nature for the sake of contradicting his.

Out past the village a little way an old road led off to the left, skirting a belt of woods and leading up a ravine, while the main one kept straight ahead, broad, level, and yellow. At its forks they stopped, undecided which one to take. A countryman driving a farm wagon loaded with great red and yellow apples, met them there and answered their greeting heartily. The eyes of the girl looked hungrily at its tempting fruit.

"Ask him to sell us some," she said to her companion, "this sharp air makes me perfectly ravenous. If he refuses I know I shall commit highway robbery."

"Sell yeh some? well, no, I reckon not, sir," he said in answer to the query. "I ain't a sellin' produce jest now. But if you an' yer lady'll jest step to the cart an' help yehselves yer welcome to all yeh can carry. They're jest in good condition now; them yaller ones is Winchester pippins, an' the others is red astrakhans, a staven good

winter apple, sir. No 'casion foh thanks, a pleasure, sir; yo mighty welcome, ma'am; that's all right, sir."

And he drowned by his rough heartiness the thanks of the two, and picked out about a peck of the largest ones for the girl, which she was forced laughingly to decline for want of means to carry them.

"Strangers in these parts I reckon, sir," he said, with the natural curiosity of country folk. "Travelers, eh? There's a good many through here since the railroad's been built. Yes, sir, it's a long wait for them cars—a-tryen' to pass the time a-walken round, I reckon?"

"Yes, we were trying to decide which road would be most pleasant for a walk."

"Well, sir, I reckon ye'd better take this road straight ahead, the best in this part o' the State, sir. Takes heavy taxes to keep it in order, but it's worth it, sir, it's worth it. They've jest put a new bridge across the creek a mile back, that is the neatest bit of building in the county, sir, worth yo' while to see it. Yeh won't see nothen by going up the old trail. It hain't been used any o' late years; wild land all along it, sir. In the whole five mile cut o' that hollow, I reckon thar ain't a farm. A root-digger lives up in the hills thar somewhares; half wild, I reckon they be, sir, an' that's all I've eveh heard of a livin' in that wild land."

"A root-digger?"

"Yes, ma'am; folks as digs gin-sang an' snake-

root and sich. Some o' them make right smart at it. These hills is full o' gin-sang. The sto'es hereabouts buys it and ships it East. Some is sent clear to Chiney from this district. Curious customers them diggers be, I reckon—but not dangerous," he added, hastily, as if to assure the girl of safety in his county. "Oh, no, ma'am! no harm in them. I b'lieve I've heerd that the man was an exhorter long ago."

"An exhorter?"

"Yes'm, a sort o' preacher; that was afore there was churches through here much, and folks 'ud gather at some neighbor's, and some o' them 'ud read the scripter to the rest. A wild place it must a been afore my time, sir. I've only been in the State four year—come here from Tennessee, I did. Sorry yeh ain't stoppin' over longer, er I'de ask yeh out to my place; always glad to meet travelen folks, we are. I live at the toll-gate, two mile out; if yer ever through this district again, I'll be glad to have yeh stop, sir. Pleased to have met yeh. Good-day to you, ma'am. Have some more apples? No? Then get up, Jerry. Good-day, sir. Good-day."

The two stood munching apples in the middle of "the finest road in the State, sir," and gazing after the talkative countryman until he turned into the village street.

"I would like to have gone home with him just now," remarked the girl, "I couldn't eat half a breakfast this morning, having to get up so early, and he looked so remarkably well fed. Did you

observe it? In my mind's eye I can see that man's table at the farm-house; hot biscuits and honey, fried chicken and hominy—um!" and she closed her eyes to shut out the tantalizing vision.

"Come, come," laughed her companion, "we had better continue our walk or you may be tempted to follow him. Which way shall we go? Do you want to see the new bridge?"

"I don't believe I do," she answered, dubiously, "that old road looks most inviting, and the fact of being warned against it, makes it the more desirable to a woman; let us try it, anyway; I don't suppose the diggers will eat us."

They walked on over the old road that grew shadier and more picturesque as it led up a ravine where the maples were ablaze on either hill, where the gurgle of a brook followed the road and mingled its low tones with the clear chatter of bird-voices that seemed singing a requiem to summer. Slim sycamores drooped white arms toward them, gleaming spectre-like amidst the crimson and yellow robes of their neighbors, looking like so many imprisoned Daphnes, whose white limbs would peep through the rough bark in which the startled nymph had found retreat. Laurel was the tree into which she merged herself, it is said, but the laurel is so bitter, its weight on the white brows of a woman has so often left deep bruises, and heartsease seldom grows near it, and Daphne was so fair, so soft, so sweet; surely she would have fled to the arms of those white, graceful, low-

murmuring sycamores. At any rate, I never see them without thinking of her, never hear their rustling without seeming to hear also her startled heart-beats.

Clusters of the slim, white forms were passed by the two, who were all alive to the soft, half-saddened beauty of the autumn day. It was decked in all its royal robes, but the faces of royalty have so seldom the gladness of spring in them, and over this day in its perfection of flaunting beauty, over all the bravado it affected in its display of charms that would lead you to think it yet strong with the strength of summer, over the struggle of pride in the proud heart that had slowly broken and spilled its life-blood over the forests, even while it smiled bravely on—over all this passion and pride of autumn there was dropping the thin, blue veil of the Indian summer; slowly, silently, with the surety of fate, it was closing in over all this glory. Saddened it was by the weight of the message it had to bear, for how could its soft voice convey any idea of the torrents of tears that were to wash all bright tints from the dauntless face of Nature? Of the low moaning of the winds that would grow into shrieks where the trees were strong in resistance? Of the white shroud that would freeze the throbbing pulse and send all the blood in their veins back to their hearts, and then down, down into the lap of their Mother Nature, where only warmth could be found?

Could Indian summer possibly be anything but

wistfully, dumbly sad? for she is the messenger of dissolution, the Azrael of the seasons.

The ravine grew more and more wild, great, gray stone shelves jutting out above and below them. Here and there were some grassy little plateaux that had evidently been cultivated at some time, though there were no late signs of a farmer's handiwork, not even the track of a wheel on the old road that was half covered with grass, not even the tinkle of a cow-bell on the still air. There was the sense of rest and peace pervading the place. One could not imagine it belonging to the world of the junction and the waiting theatrical party, the grumbling of the comedian, and the piled-up trunks with their tinsel of mimic art.

"One can almost hear the silence," he said, stopping with closed eyes for a moment.

"Nonsense!" answered Miss Practical, shying an apple-core down into the ravine, and startling a little brown bird from its leafy covert, "hear silence! No one but madmen or poets make such pretenses."

"Well, then, we will say *feel* it," he amended. "More than that I will not modify my speech. Close your eyes for an instant and stand perfectly still. Feel the silence? Of course you can. It gathers so near that it oppresses you as with a weight. It is a cloak that drapes you close and shuts out all sounds of humanity beyond those hills. You want me to think you have no imagination, that you do not comprehend, but you are

only one of that class who pretend to close their eyes and ears to all ideality, for fear of being called visionary or romantic; don't I know you? You constantly repress all feeling for fear of showing too much."

"Hear! hear!" she broke in, laughingly, "you have mistaken your vocation. You should be delivering lectures on Ideality *versus* Common Sense. Common sense will always win, my friend, while your finely spun theories—"

She stopped short, for a bend in the old road had brought them suddenly on a bit of cleared ground on which a log cabin stood. It had disclosed itself so unexpectedly that the subject of conversation was forgotten. Quiet everything was about it; not a sound broke the stillness, but all the air was fragrant from the wealth of blossoms in the garden about the rustic cottage, and as they drew nearer they noticed, in wonder, the artistic arrangement of them—something very different from the patches of garden truck and a few posies, such as generally belonged to the cabins among the hills.

There was an exquisite neatness pervading the whole, and a luxuriance of blossom that showed a care that had surely love for an aid. A path led from the little gate up to the door, which stood open.

"I am determined to go in and look at those flowers," announced the girl. "I am half drunk with the fragrance of those roses, and there is jasmine somewhere about, I know. But there is such

an air of sanctuary pervading the place—all this stillness, all this silence—I feel as if waiting for the curtain to go up on a transformation scene;" and she laughed a little, her gaze on the open door. "Go in, Aberdeen, you may find Beauty asleep waiting for the prince."

He walked between the ranks of drooping, odorous roses to the narrow stone step of the cabin. His knock was answered by the sound of footsteps over the bare wooden floor, and an instant later a figure appeared in the low doorway.

If the visitors had expected some form of youth and beauty, as the chatelaine of all that wealth of blossoms, the figure that met them was a startling disappointment. A woman it was, a woman of about forty-five; a small, grotesque figure, with a quaint, dark face, and full, steady, dark eyes. They were the redeeming point in a face that, without their keen intelligence, would have resembled an ape's. There was a large, wide mouth, a flat nose, and the face, below the eyes, narrowing until the chin was almost a point, giving it a foxy or apish outline, that yet had none of the coarseness of animalism in it. It was saved from that by the breadth of brow and the kindly light in the wonderful, dark eyes, eyes that smiled at the two without any of the shyness so often shown in the manner of the country woman.

"Good morning, madam," said the young gentleman, a little taken aback at the quaint, unexpected picture, while his companion at the gate, seeing only the grotesque figure, and out of the

range of that light in the eyes, drew back, repelled at sight of the peculiar-looking creature.

"A good day to you, sir, and to your lady, as well," she answered, in a clear, low voice, with an intonation that saved from stiffness the stately, old-fashioned greeting. "Will you walk in?"

"We only stopped to look at your beautiful garden," said the girl, drawing nearer to the chatelaine of the roses. That soft voice had a mesmeric effect, following so close on the repugnance induced by a first glance. "The flowers are so beautiful we could not resist the temptation to enter, even at the risk of being thought intruders."

"You can not be that, young lady; it does me good to see young faces. They have seldom come here, but are always welcome to me, and, I think, to the flowers."

The two visitors glanced quickly at each other, and the little woman smiled as she noticed it.

"You think that a strange remark?" she asked. "You would not if you had lived among them, having them as your only visible companions for years. But sit you down and rest. Have you walked far?"

"Only from the junction below," he answered; "we were waiting for a train north, and come up this ravine for a walk. The road is so grass-grown, we scarcely expected to find a house here."

"Yes, it has not had much travel for years, and is badly washed in places. Once in a great while, people come past here to the church-yard

above, but not often—not often, for the main road to it lies on the other side of the hill."

"You have not lived here long, then?" asked the girl, thinking of the unused road.

"Twenty-five years next spring since my husband and I came to live in this house. Time seems long or short, according to how it is lived, young lady. Some of the years were very short ones to us. He is up there now," and she nodded her head toward a well-worn path leading up over a knoll beside the house, and disappearing in the woods above.

"Are the flowers your own special care?" asked the girl. "Husbands, especially working men, have seldom time for their cultivation."

"He could always find time for them, he loved them so dearly, even as a boy, and I think—I think he does yet," and her eyes looked past them a little wistfully toward the path up which her husband had evidently gone. "This rose tree here at the door, he planted twenty years ago —a little slip it was. He brought it from Mississippi one spring when the river raised, and the rafts were sent down with the freshet. They told him it would never grow here, that the climate was too severe, but he said it would grow for him, he knew, and so it did. He coaxed and petted it into bloom, and it has richly repaid him. It is the most fragrant of all the creeping things," and she raised her hand, pulling down to her cheek a large crimson rose, whose golden heart seemed to open under her touch to a richer perfume, as her

brown fingers lingered lovingly over the shiny green of its leaves as she let it swing softly back to its place. "Yes, yes, the flowers are always grateful to the people who care for them, and they know so well the difference between earnest love and careless admiration. They are very discerning, the eyes of the flowers."

Her voice was the softest and sweetest the girl thought she had ever listened to. There was silence for a little while after she ceased, and vaguely conscious of a wish that she would continue to speak in that soothing, mesmeric tone, after which any other voice would seem discordant, they wondered at the refinement of her speech, that was such a contrast to her surroundings. She looked poor; her dress of dark calico was worn and patched, the floor of her cabin was bare, while the furniture was most primitive; but over all was the neatness, the austerity one finds in the walls of a convent, with the subtle air of the cloister through the log dwelling.

It may have been the very unexpectedness of such a meeting there in the hills that made the two view her from such a picturesque standpoint. The girl could find no words of cynicism struggling for expression in answer to the dreamy fancies of this quaint lady of the garden. A certain atmosphere pervading the place seemed to bar out all worldly logic, all cynicism that would jar on the simple, earnest character, whose primitive directness of speech had unconsciously a vein of oriental fancy through it.

"It is late for the flowers in this region, is it not?" asked the girl; "they will soon be gone now that the frosts have come."

"They are never gone entirely from me," she answered, quietly, "I keep them inside when the winter comes—all that I can move. I have had them so long I could not be without them now, and every day I want fresh ones for him up there."

"Your husband?"

"Yes, young gentleman, these were his favorites," and she gathered some golden-brown pansies, of which there was a profusion at either side of the door, and on the bare, deal table inside, a shallow dish was filled with them. "'The little folks' he used to call them, and would pick out the prettiest faces among them to bring me, in the school days. Across the hill on the other road, was the old school-house, the only one in this region in those days."

"And you were school-mates?" asked the girl, "and have known each other always?"

"Always, young lady. I have no recollections of life without him. Twenty we both were when we married, and walked across the hills here to this house—in the spring it was. The frost was yet in the ground beyond the hills, but this little plat is so sheltered, the sun seems to seek it first, and that spring was sunnier than any other had ever been before, and the 'little folks' had just opened their eyes here where he had planted them for me by the window, and the hyacinths and

crocuses were open. All through the winter he had worked and covered them from the cold, keeping them warm that they might be able to show their faces to us at our home-coming that one day."

"Twenty-five years, and you remember so well the flowers that were in bloom first?"

The dark eyes smiled at the questioner.

"Yes, young lady, it has not been hard for me to remember, for it was the day of days to me, as it is, I think, to every woman."

The two young people glanced at each other. The thought of the conversation of an hour ago was in both their minds, and the girl rose quickly and stepped out into the path through the flowers.

"I should like to look at those tuberoses," she remarked, "I can smell them above all the rest."

"Certainly," and the little woman arose and walked before them, telling them the names of many and the widely different natures hidden under their bright faces; of the crimson poppy that bears sleep in its crystal tears; of the flowers of the sun through which Clytie was enabled always to keep her face turned toward the god she loved; of the many varieties of roses that broke open their fragrant hearts monthly through the long winters, that their sweetness might bring forgetfulness of the lost summer; with here and there plants and flowers of the woods, delicate, fragile creatures, timid and a little frightened at the steady stare of the sun, but trying so bravely to hold their heads aloft and show glad faces to

the hand that cared for them so tenderly. The spiky, mottled leaves of the pipsissewa, with its healing powers hidden under the shining surface, crept close to a cluster of odorous white violets, while back of them both, nodded the lemon and orange tints of the wild lady slipper, whose relationship to the rare family of orchids she explained, and of that curious union of the hawk-moth and the flower that propagated the species. And of all she spoke as a mother speaks of dearly loved children, with a touch of pantheism in the tenderness that seemed to recognize a brother or sister in every atom of the plant-life about her.

"Look here, Aberdeen," called the girl from the corner of the garden, "look at this purple mass of heliotrope."

"Aberdeen?" repeated the little woman, "You have the face of your Scottish poet, young gentleman. I thought you of his country. I have here that 'wee crimson-tipped flower,' his song honored," and she plucked a pink-tipped English daisy from a jar and gave it to him.

"You read our Bard o' Ayr, then?" he asked.

"We read it together often in past days. We had few books, but we studied them all the more through the winter evenings, and he was always a favorite. Every creeping thing had his sympathy; no shrinking, timid one among the flowers that had not his love. His voice was that of a prophet who had a message to deliver, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, for he made clear the

path for those who were to follow and showed them warm, homely, human hearts for their study, and not the outward forms of sounding verse. Ah, yes! Burns will always be dear to the lover of rugged Nature, with all her homeliness and all her beauty."

It would be impossible to give with pen and paper an idea of the grave sweetness of her speech, that seemed like the speech of one who was communing with herself, who was in the habit of uttering her thoughts without a listener. A strange character she seemed to those two travelers. She had evidently lived so much out of the ken of her neighbors, with only the husband, the flowers, and the books for companions, that there was a purity of expression in her tones that had none of the slurred intonation noticed in the others of the country-folk, yet she said her husband and self had lived always there. Well, Dame Nature plays strange freaks sometimes. It had evidently been her caprice to place those two souls together, thoroughly in sympathy with each other, yet seemingly so thoroughly cut off from all communication with their kind.

Books, the great refiners of the mind, had not been read by her carelessly. In all her conversation was the mark of thought. From the flowers she seemed to have culled similies that were applied to the actual life about her with the imagination of a poet, and the pure diction of a scholar, and withal had a stately simplicity of expression that was not the speech of our times.

To hear her talk was like hearing the lines of Scott or of Lytton.

"I saw her books on that little shelf by the door-way," whispered the girl to her companion. "There was the Bible, Goldsmith's Animated Nature, Swift's Letters, and Taine's Literature, besides a few without covers. Suppose we had to confine our reading to those, we would think ourselves back in the dark ages."

The little lady seemed altogether delighted to hear their admiring praise of her garden.

"It is as he planned it years ago," she said, "before he went up there, and to see it changed in any way would be a grief to him, I think. You see this grass," and she pointed to a great tuft of the white and green ribbon-grass near the paling, "that came from his mother's garden years ago, before she had left our world. I use it always to tie together the flowers for him in the morning. I fancy it will please him most. As children we used to search for hours to find two of the blades exactly alike, but we never could; they are as varied as the faces our Maker has given to humanity. Did you ever think of that mighty work of the Master who never gives a duplicate, always an original to this magnificent gallery of his—the world? The flowers bring us so many lessons if we but open our ears to listen. I have listened and watched them so long that I have few thoughts not associated with them. This may all seem strange to you who lead such a different life."

"I think your companions most beautiful," said the girl, impulsively, "and as for you—well, I do not wonder they love you. You seem made for each other. We have been more than entertained to-day, and you have given us lessons from the flowers that I promise you will not be carelessly forgotten."

The laughing, mocking light was all gone from the level-looking eyes of the girl, and her voice was not quite steady. For once she was earnest with an earnestness that did not cloak itself with cynicism. There was something in the simple life and speech of the little lady that bespoke a grand patience and a simple veneration such as is conferred only by the kiss of God. The young woman of the world felt this dimly, felt drawn by the mesmeric tones into a higher, purer atmosphere, into the air that is breathed by those who live outside the artificial boundaries of what is called our world, to whom the life blood of thought has been given warm from the veins that lie closest to the heart of nature.

"And I thought her homely," said the girl, softly, to her companion, as she gathered some of the bright grass to tie some roses given by the generous brown hand. "Homely! I can not realize it now."

"She is grand," he answered in the same tone, "and to think that every morning she presents to her husband a bouquet of these blossoms. Where can you find a more delicate manner of expressing devotion? I should like to see him; he must be

an exceptional man to be worthy of her. It is an ideal home despite the primitive surroundings, for it is a marriage as such a marriage was surely intended to be. In hearing her speak of him it recalls the old legend of a soul divided into two bodies, and sent out into the world to find its mate. It sounds visionary but holds truth in it when seen in the light that seems to encircle this retreat.

The little lady came up to them with a fragrant, snowy stalk of tuberose, which she handed to the girl.

"They are almost gone," she said, "there are but two stalks left, one I give you to remember this morning's walk by, and that you have given pleasure to a lone woman by the sight of your bright young faces; the other one I keep for him to-morrow."

"Then you are lonely sometimes?"

"Alone, not lonely, young gentleman," she amended. "Once I was lonely here; it was years ago, when these hands had the impulsive blood of youth in them. It is so hard to school them into patience, ah, I know, I know! Though the long nights of one winter rebellion made them clench fiercely, instead of folding meekly to His will, and it was spring time ere the message was brought that lifted the weight from my life. All best things have been given me by the spring time, and when the day comes that He is to take me up there, I feel it will be when the crocuses and hyacinths open, the same season as

when we walked hand in hand across the hills to our home. I should like to think that on some such a day we could go the same way to the feet of our Maker. Well, it was in the spring time, and the trees were but half fledged, just bits of the tender green peeping through the rough winter coats. You see that quivering, trembling tree by my door? It is the quaking aspen; there are many in our woods. Do you know the story of the passion they witnessed centuries ago, the memory of which has thrilled their hearts to the core ever since? He told me of it long ago, when he planted it there. 'Sometime, my wife,' he said, 'we may need a reminder of this life that was given for us, and this promise of immortality through which we know that this life of ours is only an interval, an atom in the grand structure of our Father's universe. Rebellion may come to us in our blindness sometime, but we will have here a whispering reminder of a love passing that of humanity.'

"Those were his words, young gentleman. It is years since I heard them, but it is not hard to keep in your memory the words of a voice that is dearest to you of all others. And then he told me the story of the aspen tree. The cross of Christ, they say, was made from its white wood. The blood given His earthly form stained the delicate grain, and sent through all its species a shudder that centuries can not still. It is an old legend; he knew so many, and could tell them so earnestly, that they carried always some lesson

under strange fancies. Well, it was in the spring time after long months of grief over my great loss. I was lying awake in the early dawn, rebellious at the thought of days yet to be lived, when a soft whispering rustle came to my ears—so soft that it carried a soothing sense of rest to a mind tired through impotent battles. I can not convey to you the feeling borne to my senses by that whispering sound. I lay quite still, holding my breath as I listened. There came to me anon his words of the tree and its mission; and with the first green leaves of the spring it seemed striving to whisper to me a reminder of that grand patience that could say, 'Thy will be done.' That morning I rose from my bed a different person. The whispering aspen had brought to me the thoughts he meant it should bear to us when he planted it there. Something gave me a higher hope, a stronger faith that morning. I have tried to live by it ever since, and it is not so hard now. I am lonely no more. I have his thoughts, often his presence, with me, I think, and I have always the whispers of the trembling aspen, and the lessons of the blossoms; they do not leave me lonely."

"But your husband?"

"He is up there, young gentleman, up in the churchyard on the hill. It is eighteen years since he was taken there to rest. I was a young woman then, young and strong, and the dread of my life alone was terrible at first. But every day takes me nearer to him, and when age creeps closer and

the blood flows slower and slower in the veins, it is not so hard to wait."

Tears were in the eyes of the young people as she finished her story, told quietly, earnestly, and with a patience in the quaint, dark face, that was touching.

"*Eighteen years!*" repeated the girl, as the sense of all those years of loneliness came slowly to her—all those years of devotion to a memory; "eighteen years, and you here alone through them all, with no other companions? With no thought of marriage that would—"

"You do not understand, young lady," she said, quietly. "I had loved him, had been his wife; how then could I think of another?"

The girl bent her head to the reproof, uttered in the sweet, soft tones.

"I thank you," she said, softly, and reaching out a white hand, laid it gently on the brown one that had wrested its living from the herbs of the woods for so many years. The old eyes smiled on her kindly.

"It is a lesson you will learn without words from others, young lady, that is, if you use your eyes in the study of your own kind, and in the world you will find as many types for study as there are ribbons of grass in the field. But, among them all, you will find no woman content with the content that will last through old age, save the woman who has known honest love and been true to it all the days of her life."

Her two listeners as by one impulse rose to their

feet as she finished speaking, and there was an added reverence in the manner of the tall young fellow as he stood bare-headed, looking down at the patient, quaint face, and holding out his hand in farewell.

"I can not tell you the pleasure this meeting has been to me," he said, earnestly, his blue eyes moist with a great sympathy with this strange character. "I thank you for telling us your story. It will be a memory that will help me all my life to have faith in human nature."

"God be good to you, young gentleman," she said, simply. "I think it was the likeness to the eyes of your poet that shone through your own—his eyes with a comprehension of the needs of humanity that made it seem natural to speak to you so. It might be difficult with some, but I felt you would understand."

Their hands were clasped closely for an instant, and then with a low "thank you!" on his part, an earnest "God be with you!" on hers, he turned and walked down the odorous path of roses, the tints of all sadly confused and blended by the tears in his eyes that did no discredit to his manliness. The girl stooped and kissed the old face, but could find no words of farewell to utter. It was a strange parting, but the silence was more expressive than words could have been.

The two walked, without speaking, down the road to the bend, where they both stopped and looked back. The little lady was still standing by the open door under the quivering aspen, and,

shading her eyes with her hand, was gazing after them.

The girl turned away with the sound of a sob in her firm, white throat.

"And I thought her hideous," she said, tremulously. "Heaven forgive me, she is beautiful!" and then, still under the spell of the scene they had just left, she held out her hand to her companion.

"May your bonnie lassie be always as true as that woman. May your love be always to you what hers has been—a sacrament."

A ROMAUNT.

THE PROFESSOR'S STORY.

I have not been a romance writer heretofore—not even a romance reader since the beginning of my college days. I have tried conscientiously to read up in late fiction, with the idea of gaining a bit of literary style for this story of mine. But the title has been all I have secured so far. It sounded literary, so I took it. But between the spasmodical emotional school that suggests hysteria, and the psychological theories that suggest opium, toasted to the right consistency, I concluded that my bump of ideality was not equal to the elements required for the enamel of modern fiction.

Then I visited a couple of literary acquaintances, and heard discourses on story-constructing from the puffed-sleeved, straight-gowned sort, who wear sad-looking, slimsy stuffs, of jaundice tints and bilious shades. One of them talked to me three hours, on a hot day, of her dream-children that gained entrance to earth, and the eyes of men, through the workings of the thing she called her soul; and the other one never spoke of her

stories, it was always "My life, my thought, the child of my brain."

After an interview with each, I concluded this effort at fiction would have to be one without trimmings.

There are two people in this story. There may have been more. I think there was. But in the commencement of it here, I can only think of the two; and when she was seventeen, and he was twenty-three, they only thought of one another.

There is a village in the story—a village they were both born in—its name was Darlington—no matter about the State. But it is one of the good, old-fashioned places that refuse to change its solidity of opinion for the flimsiness of modern advancement. A town that is still proud of its leading citizens, who appealed to the Legislature to prevent a railroad from coming within several miles of it, and succeeded.

There was a young ladies' seminary at one end of its longest street, and a medical college at the other, so it was a place of learning—of intellect, into which a railroad would have brought strangers and other disturbing elements—so thought the residents, among them the parents of the young man, and the maiden aunt of the young lady—the hero and heroine of this romaunt.

I state this in the beginning, that it may be known just what they are. I object to mysteries; labels pinned to characters in stories might not be thought ornamental, but I think they would

save readers a deal of time in trying to solve puzzles, so I label mine.

I believe it is the usual thing in an educational institution, to single out the one that is a little dreamier than the rest of the dreamy ones, and if she can make rhymes her chums are proud of her and call her the school-poet.

The girl of my story was the poetess of Darlington seminary, and added to that she was the prettiest girl in town—so she was termed at all events; and there was not a student in the medical college who would not have sworn that her eyes held more poems than her verses. Not but what they were good verses. They may have been. I am not a judge.

A good many of the best of them—so she said then—were composed after walks on moonlight evenings with the hero. His name was—well, sometimes she called him Cœur de Leon, when some extra nerve of his in the dissecting room—the strength to look on severed flesh and scraped bones—made her shudder with fear, and then raise her blue eyes to his auburn mustache, with a look of admiring adoration, then it was that she gave him the titles of ideal warriors. And on Sundays when he wore his best clothes and read decorously in the Bible-class in the morning, and in the afternoon stood up facing the congregation, and sang with the choir—he sang bass—then it was she attributed to him those elements of angeldom, and called him—in her thoughts and the verse that was published in the county papers

—Sir Galahad; his own name was Thomas Q. Sefton.

The course of their love ran very smoothly. There were of course some days of desperation and some nights of sleeplessness, when one of the other fellows became more attentive than he had any business to be. But those two, who had taken bites from the same stick of candy in their pinafore days, would not long allow a disturbing element in their devotion. In fact, the advent of the other fellow hastened a formal avowal of something that had before been but a stammering supposition to their guileless young hearts. There were no dissenting parents or guardians in the case. In fact, their families were so delighted with the engagement that one would have supposed them each to be superfluous characters—not desirable in the homes of their relatives. Such, however, was not the case, they were nice young people, ambitious and virtuous.

I state all this in the beginning, that you may know the idyl of their young lives was a flawless one; the sort of perfect love that casts out fear—of the divorce courts. It was the sort of affection, if any there be, that is conducive to constancy and the unwavering style of thing that ties hearts together and jogs them along to a double tombstone.

I have a reason for desiring to impress this fact of flawlessness on the reader. If this is ever published the reason will be apparent. There are two other men writing each a story while I am

doing this. They have their reasons, too. When they are all done an editor is to read them, and if he ever discovers any reason why they should be published, he is to pay us a salary for the romances. Salary may not be the correct word to a literary ear, but it means money, any way. I do not know what the other two are writing about, only that they are to tell love stories.

They may tell a more stylish story than mine; no doubt they will. They may even be able to make the love in theirs manifest through the action or speech of their lovers, while I have to boldly state the fact of mine and depend on either the imagination or reminiscences of the reader to help me out. All of you have some time had a girl, a best girl, and know as well as I do the sort of conversations, and dreams of bliss they indulge in. I suppose every pair of them say about the same thing, with variations.

But though the other two may tell a more literary story than mine, I doubt if either of them can get for a foundation a more closely filtered, condensed extract of Paradise than the devotion, in the beginning, of these two nice young people of Darlington.

There was to be no haste about their union. Each had, after a searching of their inmost souls, decided in solemn exchange of vows that their love was one of the unchangeable things in the universe. They had endurance to wait until the short years would bring them closer to their ambitious hopes. Each had a yearning to take into

their united beds and boards the first fruits of their young brains, bound in Russia leather. Her poems, and his articles on *Medicinal Semeiotics* that were already gaining him notice among the students. And they would gaze pensively into each other's eyes, feeling themselves very brave in thus setting their love ahead of them for the sake of learning, feeling the great sacrifice they were making.

"It is on your account, Tommett," she said, sweetly. She called him Tommett as a pet name, a dear term known only to them two selves—their only secret. "It is for your loved sake that it is so. You must mount untrammeled to the higher rungs of anatomical studies, satisfy the craving of your soul, and search through the fleshly veil for the evidence of—of—whatever you are looking for, ere I will consent to share entirely your hours or be the innocent cause of neglect to those delvings that are to enrich the world of science. Our love is unalterable; we can wait."

As I said before, I am not a judge of verse, but suppose those who are will understand by her language that she was a poet. As for Tommett, he felt just as she did, but he could not say it like that. It was a big thing to know that the prettiest girl in town is to belong, heart and soul, to a fellow, supposing, of course, that it is the right fellow. Tommett felt that it was. And when the prettiest girl is also called a genius, what sort of love would it be that did not seek to foster the divine flame? So he thought, and so he told

Minna Evolina tenderly. She should continue her maiden meditations and string them into verse that would lead his prospective bride to fame. It was a great sacrifice to give her up to anything, even to metre and rhyme. But it was for her dear sake; that thought alone made him resigned.

The suspended union made them both feel like modern Spartans, and it helped them both in a practical way. It made Tommett feel of much more importance, gave him more confidence in himself. The adoration of a genius and the strength required for the postponement of the marriage ceremony are enough to make any young fellow have a belief in himself.

As for Minna Evolina, it was so much stock in trade to her. If the moonlight walks and the choir singing were inspirations to her, so also were the "throes of love that rocked her soul in the cradle of poesy." I take that sentence from one of the remembered poems. It sounds literary, and as I have no style of my own to embellish this romance with, I should think it allowable to borrow from one of the characters in it.

The nearest thing to grief that came between them was Minna Evolina's fear that at times her chosen did not enter into the spirit of her verse as a kindred soul should. Now the young man felt the thrill of a kindred soul when he squeezed her fingers or asked if he could kiss her. She always said yes, and he always did it. But he edged away from the subject of poems when possible; he acknowledged that he was too practical to under-

stand them always. But they were hers; therefore he loved them, and at that point in the conversation he generally kissed her again—they were very devoted.

"My dreamy fancies may seem too ethereal to you," she said, one blissful evening—"even silly to your more practical and profound style of thought. But believe me, Tommett, whatever the theme—whether subtle or shallow—it has always you and our love for a key-note. Ah, that I could sing you into the hearts of the people as you are in mine own."

She said "mine own," and "dost thou," and other terms that are poetic. That evening, she said: "And dost thou love me, Tommett?" And the young man said, "I dost, dearest," and then wondered for an hour after, just what it was he replied, and if it was or was not grammatical, and he was not a dull fellow either. But you get a pretty girl, on a summer evening, in a white dress, and have her ask you the same question in the same way, and see if it does not knock the contents of school-books out of your head instanter. It takes just about thirty seconds of that sort of existence, with kisses between breaths, to convince any student that book-bindings do not cover a monopoly of knowledge after all.

"And what would you do to prove your love for me?" she continued, sweetly, looking up at him with pensively-rolling eyes, and he deftly circled her slim waist with one of his

arms, and without hesitation said, with sweeping certainty: "Anything—everything."

And he meant it, too.

He was laconic, but he was intense. The professor of the college whom he admired most in those days, was also laconic. At first it may have been a reflected manner that gradually became the young man's own. Minna Evolina liked it. She said it lent majesty to his character and she liked majesty in a man—it made her seem very weak and very childish beside him, as if he was the strong oak and she the clinging vine, and she wondered if he would ever grow tired of her woman-like dependence on him and his ideas, and he said he never would—he hoped she would always cling, and then he kissed her again, and tightened his arm a little around her waist, tight enough to notice that the dress she wore fitted her much too snugly. He envied that dress with a lover's greediness, even while he, as her future husband and sometime medical adviser, told her gently and firmly, that three of her ribs were compressed to a degree that was not consistent with continued health, and that her dressmaker must be allowed more material, and that she must have more breathing room.

And she said she would speak to Aunt Hennie of it in the morning, and of course dear Tommett's opinion was right, she thought a dutiful wife's ideas were always a reflex of her husband's, and she wanted him to see how entirely she meant to mold herself to his wishes.

They were very happy and very guileless—a modern Adam and Eve before the fruit season.

It was about this period in their devotion that Aunt Hennie became afflicted, or endowed, with an internal ailment, a disarrangement of digestive organs, for which she was advised to try the German springs of Carlsbad. Aunt Hennie was a nice old lady, Tommett had always liked her, and he forgives her for her ailment now. But just then he was distraught over the thought that Minna Evolina was to bear her aunt company, and time and again during the days of preparation did he swear, in the privacy of his mother's house, that dear Aunt Hennie's greatest ailment was a superabundance of appetite, and that if nature had studied her needs more closely she would have been gifted with the digestive apparatus of an ostrich or a goat.

But the day of parting grew closer, and the vows of faithfulness more intense and more sure of being kept.

They each had new daguerreotypes taken, and he put a lock of his hair in the case of his and gave it to her; and she cut one of the beau-catchers from above her ear and put in the case of hers for him. She also, as an emblem of constancy in absence, gave him a bunch of immortelles tied with a green and pink ribbon.

And then the day came when he squeezed her fingers for the last time, and kissed her while she wept becomingly. And he kissed Aunt Hennie, also, and set her lunch-basket in easy reach of her

fat arms, and said to her in an aside of intense feeling: "Take good care of my darling for me." And Aunt Hennie, who did not hear very well, gave him a second kiss, and told him not to worry, for she would take as good care of herself as she could. And he heard her say to Minna Evolina that she never imagined Thomas had so deep an affection for his Aunt Hennie as he had shown at parting.

And then the carry-all drove out of sight, starting its occupants on the road to the nearest seaport. And Tommett went sadly back to his room, and looked at her picture, and kissed the immortelles, and tried to remember some of her verses, and couldn't, and then finished the evening in a lonely but instructive way—mounting on wires the bones and sinews of a hand that had a few weeks before been interred from the county poorhouse.

And thus between the soothing proof of her love that was exerted over him when he looked at the yellow white of the blossoms, and the elation of doing a delicate piece of structure in arranging the glistening blue-white of the sinews—thus between two tones of feeling as one may say, each masterful in its own way—he began his life alone.

Those two added considerably to the revenues of two governments in the next few months, their correspondence being warm and weighty. Tommett was working with a vim born of sacrificing love and scholarly ambition. She might not return for a year, but in that year he determined

that his native town and its prettiest girl should be proud of his achievements. Before six of the months had passed he was promoted to the post of assistant instructor in craniometry—it did not pay him anything, but it was a tribute paid by the faculty to his superior knowledge—there was the honor. He had also prepared some papers on "*A National Physiognomy*," for which he had Lavater as evidence for his theories. Those papers gained him special notice, several times he was greeted as "Professor" by the other students, and while a few of them—fellows from other States—had laughed when they said it, yet that taste of supremacy fixed his decision that he would have that title by right as well as courtesy. He examined his own cranium closely—it was a round head—a compact head. He thought he could see a resemblance to the first Napoleon in its general traits, that gave him confidence of his own powers of perseverance—and perseverance and the genius of hard study are the necessities of success. So he plunged deeper than ever into the studies. He would be a specialist—it was the specialists who were the men of mark in those days—he would be a marked man. And his special study—his hobby as one may say, should be his old love—phrenology.

All this he told Minna Evolina by mail, and sent her copies of his articles on *Physiognomy vs. Pathognomy*, also a trifle on *Average accumulation of gall of the different races.*

And she congratulated him in poetical lan-

guage and sent him copies of her late verses and a synopsis of the others she intended writing. And Aunt Hennie gave him by letter a diagnosis of the benefit Carlsbad waters had been to her. She liked Europe, it agreed with her; she expected to remain there some time. She was going south for the winter into Italy, where she had distant relatives living, whom she never had seen. Minna Evolina was becoming saturated, as it were, with the scholarly and literary elements in which she found herself in Germany. Her foreign friends prophesied great things of her when her provincialisms would disappear, and nothing was so conducive to that end, said Aunt Hennie, as travel and life in strange countries. As for the marriage, they were both very young, they could afford to wait.

Minna Evolina said about the same thing, but it was in a poetical, pleading letter, asking sweetly for permission from her intended to prolong her stay. And he read it with the feeling of a man who owns property, and graciously granted her request.

So the first year went by, and about that time Minna Evolina dropped a little loose from verses and took to prose writing. The poetry satisfied her soul needs best, but the prose was the only thing editors would pay her for, and as editors' checks mean fame she dropped the poems, except a few straggling ones to Tommett.

But the straggles grew less as she gradually was changed from a pensive maiden penning verses into

a would-be professional woman who liked to see "journalist" added to her name. And as the prose work was not so easy to submit to his judgment he saw no more of her work in manuscripts. The editor of the most eager magazine grew to be the person for whom her heart throbbed—on paper.

At first he did not like the change, but the more he thought of it in a sensible, practical light, the more he understood it was a natural transition. She could not always remain the childish creature she had been, and also accompany a man through earnest life and win fame for herself on the way. And he finally convinced himself that he should be glad that this change was fitting her more fully for the honorary position she would some day hold as the wife and helpmeet of a man of mark—an authority on the scientific and fascinating study of craniology. Such was his ambition, and to that end the home of his parents was made a museum of brain coverings, a collection of skulls that was the finest owned by any private individual in the State. Many of his profession visited him and went away impressed by the wonderful application of so young a man, and cited his industry and enthusiasm to others. Thus he became talked about; to be talked about is fame. He was famous in his own region, and he had patience and youth enough to afford to wait for the fame of the world.

As his professional duties and studies widened, so did his correspondence, and, to Minna Evolina,

he was by necessity forced to send shorter epistles than at first. But he explained it fully to her, and she understood it fully; thus there was perfect understanding between them, never a discord or a doubt. At the end of the second year, Aunt Hennie really died, to Tommett's surprise. Her niece was, of course, overwhelmed with grief, and wrote that for the present she would remain abroad with dear Aunt Hennie's relatives. She did not ask permission this time, she probably forgot it in her grief, so he thought, as he read her letter, and laid it aside to put new wires in the latest addition to his collection—the cranium of a deceased Zuni, whose breadth of jaw-bone helped prove a theory he had been interested in for some time.

Did I speak before of the appearance of Tommett? I believe not. He never made any pretense of being a handsome man, but he did flatter himself on having an impressive personality. He had heard it said that once seen, his face was not one to be easily forgotten—in fact, never to be forgotten. Another instance of resemblance to the first Napoleon. He was one of the men who grow bald very early. At first, when he had to brush his thin, auburn locks over his forehead, he was filled with a natural human regret, at the thought that Minna Evolina might not admire him as of yore. But a look at the daguerreotype and the immortelles reassured him. They were enthroned in a place of honor—on the largest, broadest skull in his collection—that of a Hano-

verian Dutchman. And looking at these mementos of her that brought back to him her vows of devotion—if need be, of sacrifice, he knew that a few hairs more or less would make no difference in her heart, and in his profession it gave him an added weight. I do not know why it is that a bald man, or a married man, can gain more confidence in professional work than their opposites—but such is a fact, perhaps from the idea that they have each seen trouble, and so know how to give sympathy to others. And when Tommett was given by scholarship, instead of courtesy, the title of professor, his cranium had made itself visible through his hair to a considerable extent, it seemed to fit him for those extra degrees. And he was happy, the only flaw being the absence of his loved one, whom he was sorry had to wait the time of a tedious mail ere she heard of the honors that would one day be shared by her.

And so in everything did their thoughts go across the ocean where the other one was.

She had been gone over three years when Thomas Q. Sefton, Professor of Anatomy in Darlington College, was offered a permanent position by the faculty, who decided he was too valuable to lose. He was twenty-seven at that time, but looked ten years older, perhaps because of the baldness, perhaps because of the studious delvings among his specimens. Nothing, however, in his appearance could alter the fact that the position was one to be proud of. It was a permanency. He was, in a way, settled for

life, and had now some time to think of getting married.

And to Minna Evolina he intimated as much. But he did not call her Minna Evolina any longer, she objected. Her Italian friends had said it was provincial, and much too long. Evoli, she thought, was better. It had been considered so for her literary work, and she wrote her name M. Evoli Brattlesex.

She was as willing as he that at last their marriage should be consummated—so she said, and she said also that so far in her life, her loved work and her dear Thomas had been the only rivals in her heart.

He noticed that she did not call him Tommett any more, but told himself, like a philosopher, that they must both expect changes. Their affection would be the same, of course; but they were four years older than at their separation, and would, of course, express themselves differently. She wrote him she was going on a short tour into Sicily with some friends. After that she was to sail for America, and two of her Italian cousins were to come with her. One of them was also a writer. She called him Cousin Eduard. They were to make the intended tour with the idea of finding types for future fiction.

In fact, her later letters were full of types where they used to be full of poems. She never seemed to meet people any more. They were all "studies" or "types" or "characters."

Of course, he knew those were merely profes-

sional terms, acquired through her acquaintance with journalism. They did not quite appear to suit the clinging vine he had kissed when he wanted to; but for all that, he knew that, aside from her work, his M. Evoli would be the same.

He put on his newest suit when going to call on her immediately on her arrival; and then he took it off again and sat looking at it in doubt.

He was hard to fit in pantaloons. His frame was all right, but it was lacking in the covering of fleshy tissue, that gives voluptuous curves to forms. The pantaloons of that suit looked better than such garments usually did, yet he hesitated. Should he indulge his vanity and wear them and the coat to match, or should he wear the older suit, that had grown used to him? Would she not rather see him, the playmate of her youth, in the less pretentious garb that bespoke ease to himself, perhaps to her? He knew that ere they met, she would have learned from her Aunt Lucy the enviable position he now held; that where she had left him an unknown student, she would find him a personage spoken of with pride by his townspeople. He knew her timid, clinging nature. He remembered her nervousness and her impressionability, that was equaled only by a phonograph. He knew that, in view of the many changes that had passed—dear Aunt Hennie—the meeting must be trying to her—and he felt himself comforting her already, but not feeling quite so sure of what he would say to her as he used to be; only she must not be made more nervous by any show of the

greatness that had come to him. No! she must be made to forget the professor for a little while, and remember only the student.

And he looked at the lengthwise crease down the knees of the new broadcloths and sighed, and picked up the old ones, on which the creases ran crosswise, and pulled them on.

Do not think that a trifling sacrifice; it was not.

All the way along the placid street of Darlington he pictured to himself their meeting. He expected a few tears. He remembered that his mother and his sister always wept when going away on a journey or coming home from one. His masculine mind had not, as yet, quite grasped the reason; but he supposed they all did it.

He hoped her other aunt would have consideration enough to let their meeting be a private one, and keep herself out of the way. Aunt Hennie had never been out of the way. And then he remembered that dear Aunt Hennie was no doubt stopping with relatives now who would gladly give up all the room they had to her, he must not harbor bitter memories, or be more ungenerous than they, he would think only of the fond creature waiting impatiently his coming.

And with that happy, idiotic delusion, he sounded the knocker.

Jim, their colored man-of-all-work, opened the door.

"Yes, sah, they's done come home," he answered, with smiling pomposity, and was about to precede our hero to the parlor, when he said:

"I know the way. I will announce myself." The door was slightly ajar, someone was touching the keys of the piano disjointedly, and he could hear someone else laughing.

"Ah, yes, ma belle cousin," he heard a man say, "it is as you say to us—all very quaint—very old fashion—your birthplace. But it is not the oldness that inspires. The age of your America is like the age of old garments—it is flimsy; but the age of Italy is the age of old marble—it is enduring."

"You are incorrigible, Cousin Eduard," said the soft, sugary voice he remembered, "you see nothing beautiful here because everything is not in ruins."

"I venture to contradict a lady, since I see you here," he said, and then another woman laughed and said:

"I knew you would say that, Eduard, you never could resist temptation. How you are to exist here without peasant girls to flirt with, is, to me, a puzzle, you and Evoli will, in desperation, develop into the most extreme of type-hunters."

"I can not flatter myself that I am to have the monopoly of our cousin now," said the man in a dreamy, distressed tone, "there is a *fiancé* here you must know, together they will go hunting for types, and alone will Eduard be forgot."

"What is he like?" asked the woman's voice again. "You are so sly, you have not even shown me his picture. Have you one? Is he handsome? I know his profession, he is very

learned, is he not? so your dear aunt told me. Shall we see him soon? will he help you to hunt for types, or will he furnish you one himself, tell us all about him."

Our hero did not intend listening at first. He only wanted to know if she who held him nearest and dearest was inside the parlor door. But the man's voice had checked his entrance for a moment, he hesitated, and was lost. He was not a society man, he had no time for its trifles. His daring was undoubted when its application was needed for his professional work, but he shrank from meeting strangers with the timidity of a recluse. Hearing the conversation made him wish he had kept on the other pantaloons, and then he wished he had let Jim announce him, he knew Jim would have given him his full title, and that might help overbalance the crosswise creases of the old ones, and then he slid away a little from the parlor door, and wondered if he could get out the back way without being seen or commented on. He could return later with new clothes and more confidence.

In the dread of meeting foreign strangers, under existing circumstances, he could not remember as he got out the back door just what the errand was that had taken him there, he tried to think of it as he grabbed his hat and umbrella—and couldn't.

On the back porch he met Jim with an armful of wood and a broom, Jim nearly dropped them both in his surprise. "Why — why, Marse Po-

fessah, yo' not done gone a'ready 'thout seein' Miss Minna Ev'lina an' the quality folks?" "Miss Minna Ev'lina" brought back to our hero, remembrance of what he had come for.

"Ah, certainly not, Jim," he said, in a shaky, trying-to-get-out-of-it sort of a way. "But I thought that as—well, understanding, as I may say, that you—that I—in fact, that your young mistress had company, I thought that perhaps—perhaps you had better announce me."

He had not intended to say that at all, when he began, and Jim looked at him as if he thought the study of other men's brains had softened his own, for he kept his eye on him as he carefully laid down the wood and the broom, and gingerly edged past him into the hall.

"Marse Doctah Pofessah Sefton!" he announced, with as much pomposity of manner as he was wont to use when master of ceremonies. Perhaps the tenacity with which the Professor clung to his hat, when Jim tried to get it out of his fingers, had something to do with it. Everything seemed awful quiet as he went in the door, and Jim sidled out. He had heard laughing a second before.

Then some one came toward him from the piano, she looked taller than Minna Evolina had looked, but she said:

"My dear Professor, how charming to meet you once more!"

Her voice and her eyes were the same, otherwise it was not his Minna Evolina—it was Evoli. He had not imagined the shortening of a name

would have made such a difference. She introduced her cousins to Professor Sefton, they were both charmed, so they said. The Professor said: "How do you do?" and that's about all he did say to them. Cousin Eduard had long mustaches, and a Byronic collar. Cousin Agnace, his sister, was about forty—a slim, long-drawn-out forty, with the kittenish brightness of sixteen. She skipped from one window to another, and rustled her starchy skirts, and wondered "if they would really allow her to pluck some of the pears from the trees her own self, instead of having a servant do it. Yes? how charming; and would dear Eduard go with her to the trees? Ah! he was such an angel of a brother; and would the learned Professor pardon them each, that they retired into the garden for one little while? Yes? and her Evoli must not miss her—not long would she remain away."

And the learned Professor excused her, with inaudible thanks, and the angel of a brother put a shawl around the giddy young creature's shoulders, and looked languishingly at Evoli, and bowed profoundly to the learned Professor, and then they took themselves off with more ceremony than people were used to in Darlington houses. And Minna Evolina and Tommett had the room to themselves.

So far there had been no tears, no nervousness, and he felt as if all that idea of her being impressed too deeply by the change that had been, was a mistaken calculation, and noticing the stylish

dressing of herself and cousins, he wished she knew about the other suit he could have worn if he wanted to.

But he did not tell her. He looked at her as lovingly as he could, while he wished she would wear her hair lower on her neck, and show the shape of her head more. It was very finely formed, idealistic organs well developed, form and color much above the average, the entire formation of the cranium denoting advanced intellectual possibilities, a good study; he was so much interested in its manifestations that he forgot to say anything after the other two went out; until, after a while, he realized there had been a long silence, and that his Evoli was looking a little uneasy at the directness of his gaze that was attracted to her height of forehead. Then he tried to say something in a careless, nonchalant manner, but could not think of anything. He jingled nervously some odd joints of finger-bones, that had been forgotten in his coat pocket, and at last he said: "My dear Minna Evolina," and she said: "My dear Professor."

And then he let go of the finger-bones in his pocket and reached for her hand, and got it, and said tenderly:

"How much you have grown."

And then they had a nice, long visit with each other, as the old ladies say, and he told her of the marriages and deaths, and his own acquired honors; and she told him of the new types she had been making a study of lately, and that she

expected to find some good material through her return to America; the impressions of American characteristics would be so much clearer to her now when they formed such a contrast to the foreign element she had been surrounded by for so long. And he told her of his collection of skulls, and at that point in the conversation the cousin with the mustaches and the cousin with the petticoats came in again, and the timid creature declared her terror of the skulls, yet, "If her dear Eduard, her dearest Evoli, and the learned Professor were of the party, she would go to see them. Yes, she would be charmed, such a curiosity of a study! Yes, she would be disconsolate to leave America without having seen this most grand collection."

And it was arranged that they were all to visit the Professor's collection very soon. Cousin Eduard expressed himself as profoundly interested. "What possibilities in such a study! what characters could be evolved from it, what types might not one find through such a collection!"

And then Cousin Eduard looked at Cousin Evoli, and then at the Professor, and she looked at the Professor, too, and held out her hand when he left and told him to come often to see her—to come whenever he felt like it, and he said he would, and wished his hair wasn't quite so thin when he saw Cousin Eduard toss back the flowing locks from his poetic brow. And then he went home and dusted the skulls and wondered

how it would seem to have a wife to help him in his work of love, and that is the account of the day when Tommett met for the first time his Evoli.

She did not call him Tommett at all, not even when they were alone, which did not happen often. She did let him kiss her, but something kept him from having the same confidence in the venture that had of old been an every-day affair. She asked him not to call her Minna Evolina, especially before folks, she preferred him using the one that had been her trade mark in literature.

He asked her when she was going to change her trade mark for his, and she looked at him with a sigh, a happy sigh of course, and said, pensively:

"You still remember so fondly the loves of our childhood?"

He said he did, and he said it decidedly. "The loves of our childhood" was the term she had applied several times to that sweet fever of fondness that only time cures, and the repetition of it was aggravating to him. He could not always think of it himself in the present tense, not with the same degree of absorption that it had been. But it was not comforting to know that the natural course of events made her look at it in the same light, first for types, afterward for Tommett.

And when he said the love of his childhood still bound him, and asked again as to the wedding day, she answered sweetly and passively:

"Whenever you say, dear." And he said next week.

That was the time when she told him he had no consideration—that he was proposing an impossibility. And then Cousin Eduard lounged in and told Cousin Evoli he was ready to drive her for the ferns she wanted, and would Professor Sefton honor them by his accompaniment?

Professor would not; he was not a wrathy man, but that confounded Eduard with his long, sleepy eyes was a cause of irritation to him that day. Leutz holds that the Jews have more gall than other men, and through it there is preserved that individuality of feature that makes them a marked race. Leutz was one of the standards for whom the Professor had an admiration—seldom contesting his theories, but going home that day he debated whether Leutz would not have made an exception in favor of Cousin Eduard had he been so unfortunate as to have known him. From localizing symptoms that made themselves manifest from day to day, he decided that that idealistic lounger had an amount of gall equal to preserving intact more unadulterated individual impudence than he could think possible in one specimen of the *genus homo*.

Evoli's willingness that the marriage should be before a great while, took a doubt from his mind that had perplexed him sometimes. She had not appeared to enjoy his collection as he had hoped Minna Evolina would have done—that of course was a cause for regret. She remarked one day

that of course he would have a room at the college for them when married—it would seem so like a charnel house to have them in one's private abode. That set him to thinking seriously. It made him remember the words of Lavater, who said: "If thou hast an almost spherical head contract no alliance with a long, high forehead." Evoli had a high forehead—a long head. He had an almost spherical head. It never had occurred to him before to compare them. But it recurred to him several times in the next few weeks.

And when she spoke in that way of his collection he felt like asking if she intended to have a separate house for her types and her dictionaries. But he didn't; he reflected that such a remark might jar on the sweetness of their affection—that had been.

He was much more careful of his appearance than of old—the business suit that had been his was put away, and he looked as smart in broadcloth and silk hat as that limber-looking Italian did in his long hair and wide collar—though, perhaps, not so picturesque. He did not care for that, he preferred to look majestic and dignified—which he did. One would have known he was an M. D. or an LL. D. to look at him. He looked like a man of importance—so his mother told him.

Evoli did not speak of his appearance as Minna Evolina had done. She never compared him to the oak any more. Perhaps she forgot it. And he wondered sometimes how he ever had got the idea

that she was a vine and made to cling. She had evidently dropped the habit of clinging while in Europe, for he saw no manifestations of it.

The marriage was settled on for six months ahead. Her Italian cousins were disconsolate at having to leave before the event—the Professor was not. He was in hopes that when they were gone, he might hear a few conversations that were not confined to "types."

He was hurrying to complete a work on his beloved study before the momentous occasion, and wished often that Evoli had a more heart-felt interest in it, for reasons.

The series of learned articles he was preparing, were to be illustrated, each illustration was to be of a distinctly different character of a head. He had already some very fine ones made, one of a Calmuc Tartar, that suggested a very short missing link; another, of an East Indian, whose pointed skull was a thing of pride to a craniologist; a magnificent specimen of a negro, who looked like a black Ajax with his head shaved; and a once noted politician, who was so bald he did not need to be shaved, had kindly let the Professor use his head as an illustration of theories advanced. His head had a decided likeness to Socrates. There were many others, people of all races, all colors. But the ideal head of the lot was one he had spent considerable thought over. It was not easy to get.

Evoli had a head that would do. He had noticed the shape of it immediately on her return,

and had been lost in admiration of it many times after. He laid awake several nights thinking what a magnificent specimen it would make if only that heavy covering of hair was out of the way.

Another statement of Lavater's occurred to him in conjunction with that idea. It was that "vanity and pride is the general character of all women!" He supposed Lavater was right, in fact, he was pretty confident of it. And he believed she set considerable store by that hair. He had heard Cousin Agnace exclaim over the charming way in which it would kink up on wet days, and he remembered Evoli had looked pleased, and declared her dear cousin was flattering her.

Of course it would be a bit of a sacrifice to part with, especially before the wedding. He thought of that; but if he, her future husband, the man who would have to look at her most, requested it, could she refuse? Not if her affection was what she had said it always would be, he decided. He remembered how often she had said, "Put my love to any test, dear Tommett, and see if I do not stand it, and maintain my maiden vow. Even though you drank or chewed tobacco, I would none the less look on myself as your wife. Put my affection to any test if you doubt."

He remembered a few of those passionate appeals, made before she went away, and he decided that he would comply with her request.

She was not in the house when he called. Jim said she was in the garden, writing. He went to

the garden. What place so fitting to the meeting of lovers? he said to himself, and looked in the hall mirror as he passed it, and smoothed the hair forward a little from the back of his head, and then he sauntered out to find her.

He could not see her, but in one of the arbors—a rose arbor—he found her writing materials. There was her portfolio and the ink, and on the bench beside them, were some loose sheets of her MSS. He knew that wherever she was, she would come back there for them. So he sat down, and for pastime picked up some of the sheets to see what she was doing—he was confident she would not object, they had read too many together for that.

The first of the story was not there, but his surprise and delight were great when he found by those fragments that the subject of it was in part Phrenology, or Craniology, he could not quite make out which, but there was enough to show that the dear girl had entered more deeply into a sympathy with his beloved work than he had ever guessed. She had evidently meant it as a sweet surprise to him. He felt as he made the discovery that she was once more his Minna Evolina. He could not make out much of the plot because of parts missing, but there was a craniologist in the story; an old man, he imagined. It did not say so, but from the little bits of description and his way of speaking it could not be a young one. And the old man fancied himself in love with a girl, but he really was only in love with the

skulls. That seemed to be the idea of it as far as he could gather, and he thought it must be an original one. But whatever the merits of the story may have been, it pleased him just then, for it showed an interest in his study that he had not suspected, and if his appreciation of it was so great, all the more probability that she would enter with enthusiasm into the proposition he had come to make, and he was in quite a state of elation when he heard her voice. She was talking to some one in the garden, but she was coming closer, so he waited.

"I can not use it," she said, as if she was worried, "and I am so sorry, it is the cleverest character story I have written."

"Can not you change it one little bit, enough not to be known?" And the Professor, who had risen to go to her, stopped, for it was Cousin Eduard's voice. "No, I can not," and the tone was more despondent than before, "if I change it I lose the character. It would no longer be a distinct type."

The Professor sat down again when he heard that word, he was tired of it.

"So unfortunate!" said the slick, smooth voice again, "ah, ma belle cousin, why were you not more wise?"

"How was I to know?" and she seemed more vexed. "I did not know very much, any way, I was a silly little creature. It is my own character that is changed, not—not any other person's. I tell you the truth, I used to think that person

very admirable, because of the learning, I suppose, that was so far beyond my own—then, and it made me do and say all sorts of foolish things that I do not like to remember. But it will all come right no doubt when I get myself to thinking in the same way again, and I will in time, of course."

"How lamentable that you are made to see but a type, instead of what you once did see," said the smooth voice again. "It is a great pity when we have to quarrel with a too clear vision."

"I would rather not talk about it any more, Eduard," said Evoli, "it does not seem right, only you saw the story and the—the sketches I made, and you know what it all meant. I really could not help writing it, the idea was so humorous it was a pleasure to write it up."

"My poor cousin! if you are not given that sympathy and understanding which your soul requires I tremble for you! You are so sensitive to impressions."

"Say no more, Eduard," and Evoli spoke as if she was studying for tragedy; "do not grieve for me in Italy, I will live, I must, that my work may live."

"And the story?"

"We must burn it."

"My brave cousin! you speak the words with courage—but I see you look pale. Yes, at once you should burn it, and bury with it the memory —wait! I think I have a match in the pocket of this, my waistcoat."

"There are some sheets of it on my desk, will you bring them?"

"Here to the garden?"

"Yes—yes, the idea of the story came to me in the garden, let me bury it among the flowers. The rest of it is in the rose arbor, come to me there."

The Professor was rather muddled at all the preamble that he did not understand. He felt antagonistic when he thought of that fellow's sympathy that was evidently uncalled for—he could not discover any reason for sympathy. He even felt like stepping out and asking what he meant by it, and telling him he was a meddling jackanapes. And then he remembered that Cousin Eduard, though lazy, was muscular, there might be a scene, Evoli might be frightened, and he sat still.

Evoli came into the arbor looking pensive, she said the surprise of seeing him there was most agreeable. And then she looked through the rose leaves to see if people on the other side would be visible to the naked eye. And she must have concluded not, for she said again that it was most agreeable. She sat down on the bench with the portfolio between them, and he lifted it and slid up closer.

He intended asking what she and her cousin were talking about, but when he saw her he forgot all about it. He could see and think of nothing but the well-shaped cranium, and the development of ideality needed for that illustra-

tion. And he said lovingly, "You remember dear Min—my dear Evoli, how often we made promises that should our devotion be put to the test we should not fail—do you remember?"

"Yes," Evoli thought she did.

The reply was not very encouraging since she only "thought" it. The Professor sighed a sigh for the past adoration that had no suppositions, it had known all that was, all that would be, through all eternity of love.

But this was not a moment for retrospection—it was business, that head meant a good many dollars to him through the interest it would awaken in the eyes of the public when they knew that a beautiful woman had sacrificed her beauty for awhile for the furtherance of this grand educational achievement, so he went on—

"The time has come, dear Evoli, when I must put your love to a test; when I have to ask of you what may at first seem like a sacrifice, but when looked at from a philanthropic point of view—that of benefit to many—will, I am sure, be one to awaken your warmest approval."

She pulled two or three rings off her fingers absent-mindedly and tried them on her thumbs, and finding they would not fit, she slid them back where they belonged, and said, languidly:

"What is it?"

"Would you, dearest, to prove the devotion you have so often avowed, to glorify the name you are one day to share—"

She looked at him when he got that far; it was

a look of curiosity, but not of pleased, reassuring curiosity. He felt himself weaken a little under it, and then made an earnest attempt to put the request in the words that would impress her most favorably; but the words were slow coming, and she said, rather impatiently:

"Well, Professor, what in the world is it?"

There was another spasmodic effort to find some glossing, glowing phrase in which to express his plea, and succeeded in saying, pathetically:

"Would you—would you shave your head?"

She started as if to run, but he caught her and held her while he tried to explain. She must have really been very timid and more nervous than he had thought possible, for she imagined him insane. And it was not until he had taken from his pocket the pictures of the Calmuc Tartar and the Ethiopian that she could be made to understand what he meant by the request. And even then he was not sure that the proof had won him any favor.

"And you really anticipated doing me the honor of placing my head with such a collection?"

"Such a collection," spoken in that tone, is not complimentary to the author of said collection. The Professor felt the sting. He wanted to tell her she should be proud of being selected as a specimen, but he didn't. He told her firmly, with the old manner she had admired once, that an attempt to educate the masses was a subject for commendation, not sarcasm.

He thought that oak-like dignity might impress her, but it didn't. She said she "did not

fancy that the masses would ever hear of the attempt."

That was unkind, but he bore it, and heaped coals of fire on her head by saying:

"Evoli, my soon-to-be wife! if it was to please you, I would gladly shave every hair off my head without question."

And all she said was—

"You would not need to."

The sentence was brief, but full of meaning. He had his hat in his hand. He put it on when she said that.

And just then Cousin Eduard's voice sounded on the other side of the arbor:

"Are you there, my Cousin Evoli?" he asked. "Here are the leaves, also some drawings of them that I found there. Agnace calls me; she must not see them, neither your betrothed; they tell me he is in the house. I thrust the papers through the hedge, also a match. I return to you quickly. Adieu."

Evoli grabbed for the papers so quickly it aroused the Professor's interest in them. He grabbed for them, too. There was no word spoken, but failing in getting the papers, she reached for the portfolio; so did he. Between them one of the bits of paper fell to the ground. He recovered it. It was a pencil drawing. Did I tell you she could draw? She could. The sketch was hers.

"How dare you look at my work when I give you no permission?" she asked, trying to reach

for it, but he was just tall enough to keep it beyond her.

"A man can be pardoned, surely, for wanting to look at his own picture," he said.

When he made that remark her visage became inflamed by the superabundance of blood carried up to it—that is, she blushed. But the blush was not of the kind that is caused by the emotion of love, such as had once colored Minna Evolina's cheek. Far from it. This congestion—medically speaking—was a secondary result of spasmodic contraction of the respiratory muscles of the larynx, accompanying clinching of the teeth, leading to incipient asphyxia. She did not speak, however, she just sat down.

The drawing was a caricature, but there was in it enough of a likeness to recognize himself. He was leaning with his elbows on a table, and in his hands he held a skull over which he was gloating like a lover on newly discovered charms. A lady sat opposite with a breakfast cap on her head. She offered him a cup of coffee with a love-lorn look in her eyes; he did not see her, he was oblivious to all but the hollow-eyed specimen in his hands. Yes, there was his bald head and his thin neck, the latter craned forward to make it look thinner than ever.

"Very good," he said, in commendation, "a good illustration of the scene described. Oh, yes, I read it while waiting for you to get through talking to Cousin Eduard. I know about the whole story now, the misunderstood souls and the

fallen ideals, and the whole business. I am glad you have found some recompense in a type; my gladness is only exceeded by my affection."

He had begun coolly and calmly, determined to preserve his dignity. He would let her see he had some live brains, though he did study dead ones. But the unlucky reference to Cousin Eduard brought him wrathy memories. He wanted to fight some one—the man, first of all, who had seen that caricature, and his voice rose several tones. He felt that it sounded even shrill—an echo of his mother's when she was angry.

"Affection!" she retorted, in answer to his last statement, "how can you speak of affection when you don't know what it means? You! why you would shave my head, and no doubt boil me alive if you wanted my skeleton, but you can't have it!"

"And I don't want it!" he said, energetically. "I don't want even the skeleton of a woman who has so little feeling as to caricature what should be her dearest emotions, and sell them at so much a page. Such a woman can never be wife or mother to Prof. Thomas Q. Sefton's children."

And he straightened himself up and looked at her with a calm, decided gaze, that told her he was not to be persuaded, even if she wanted to.

He did not learn if she wanted to, he does not know yet. She picked up her garden hat and said, she had never proposed to be wife or mother to his children, and asked him how many

he had, and then walked away before he could answer.

And that was the end of an absorbing affection that defied change; a love that was just as intense as any other love—even one in a story. The Professor in it was a class-mate of the Professor who writes this, they were very much together, hence the knowledge of this romance.

To satisfy the minds of the readers who always want to know the history of people into the next generation, I will state that Evoli turned her back on Darlington and went back to Italy. She and Cousin Eduard soon after that decided to put in their lives studying types together. They have found a half dozen or so on whom they would have to pay taxes if all one's live stock came under taxation. They no doubt welcome them as heirs to their trade marks and glory. I suppose they call them all Eduard and Evoli, as no other names would be romantic enough for those ethereal souls. I doubt if you could find a Tommett among them.

The Professor awakened from the love of his childhood just in time to realize the discontent it might have led him to; he never ventured so near a yoke again. He still lives in tranquil enjoyment of his collection that has gained a reputation satisfying all his hopes.

Now you will see this is not a case of forced separation of fond hearts, there was no adverse influence as the cause of that love that just got sick and died a natural death, unmourned. In

the beginning it had been an illusion—the sort of illusions that won't wear. I have not found any of them yet that did. It was simply the natural result of lives and people that grow older and away from the things they liked to play with as children; we are progressive, we want new toys, new dolls. Some people hug their old ones through life and pretend they don't see the noses that get battered, and the paint that is chipped off the cheeks. Those two might have done the same thing if it had not been for the accident of the types and the skulls; no doubt they both congratulated themselves on the accident, the writer knows one of them did.

This story, as I said before, is told with an object. It may or may not convince my colleagues, but it was the only one I knew, and I had to tell it or say nothing.

I state again that this is the only romance in the brain of the author. I do so that there may be no requests for more from a greedy public. I do not intend to pose as a romance writer, and have not time to answer letters from people I don't know. I have no autographs to spare, and don't know any verses for albums.

GALEED.

THE BOHEMIAN'S STORY.

CHAPTER I.

"This heap is a witness between me and thee this day. Therefore was the name of it called Galeed.

"And Mizpah; for he said, The Lord watch between me and thee when we are absent one from another."—*Genesis* xxxi, 48, 49.

"And will you not come with us, Dale—really?"

"Not if you will excuse me. I stopped only to tell you I felt like trying to catch up with some lagging correspondence to-night."

"But think! the last week of the season, and if you really go mooning out into the country as you intend, you will be buried out of sight of the drama for weeks to come."

"I should not mind much if you would share my exile," and the man's hand lay a moment on the warm whiteness of the girl's arm. A pretty arm and a pretty girl with her large, brown eyes glancing at him witchingly, and the green, foamy stuff of her evening dress enhancing the warmth of her blonde hair, and the red lips turned toward him in a pert way that was a half challenge.

"Would you not? how singular." But the mirror opposite the steps where they stood told the clear eyes that it was not at all singular.

"Why wait any longer, Blanche?" he asked, persuasively; "my probation is lasting until I begin to feel old."

"Well, you see, Dale, our plans, our trip to the other side, would be broken up, and—oh, well, so many things."

"Yes, I know—so many things," he repeated.

The brown eyes glanced at him curiously—was there any significance in his tone, or was it only her imagination?

"And I know that in reality you are longing to get away to your scribbling," she hastened to say half-teasingly, "and all by yourself too, though your gallantry will not allow you to say so. You should thank me for taking myself off your hands for so much longer."

"Should I?" he asked rather moodily; "well, I do not think I am, and—wait a moment Blanche—did you say 'yes' that night because you cared for me, or only because that light in the conservatory was so romantically dim? rather the orthodox surroundings for proposal and acceptance. I remember you had on a lovely new dress, and were so well satisfied with yourself, and, therefore, with me. Was it all the fault of the suggestive surroundings, or—"

"Nonsense!" laughed the girl, "what an imagination you have; a rather ironical one, to-night."

Just then a voice from below called "Blanche Athol, how long are you going to keep us waiting?"

"There is Nellie calling—can't you come? Oh, those stupid letters; are you sure one of them is not to that mysterious individual, Mrs. Holmes? No? Well I am not jealous of the rest, so I will leave you."

"If I thought you cared enough to have any jealousy in the matter, I would feel reassured in many ways," he said quite earnestly, detaining her an instant with his hand touching the petite waist.

"Then be assured," she answered, with a coquettish turn of her head, "I am ferociously jealous. I am in the last stages of infatuation, and to prove it—is any one looking? there!"

"Blanche!" called the voice again, "Please remember there are reflecting mirrors on that landing, and I have an excellent view of Dale and yourself from here. If you will only stand still a few moments I will call Mr. Haverly to help me enjoy it."

The two on the landing drew apart quickly.

"Is Dick Haverly going with you to the theatre?" he asked, rather sharply.

"Why, yes, he was to come for Nellie, you know."

"Was he? No, I did not know. But of late I've been drifting into the conviction that there are several things in the world I do not know."

"Really? how clever! But if nothing else, you

must know that we will miss the first act of the comedy if I keep them waiting any longer. Good-night, and happy dreams of—Mrs. Holmes."

And laughing in a tinkling, silvery way, with mocking face turned upward toward him, the girl ran down the steps, he watching her in the mirror until she vanished.

"The first act of the comedy," he muttered, sauntering down the hotel corridor to his own room. "I wonder if it is not rather the beginning of a farce for both of us—the time of action required for it merely—an existence."

CHAPTER II.

"Fool!" said my muse to me,
"Look into your heart and write."
PHILIP SIDNEY.

HOTEL ARLINGTON, NEW YORK CITY.

MY DEAR GEORGE: I suppose you think me a neglectful sort of fellow, that I have not written you for so long. But be a little lenient and I will try to make amends. I shall go to you for a few weeks, if possible, this spring. I am anxious to take my "outing" away from the social swim, and what spot was ever quite so restful as your parsonage. But it will be for only a short time. I have work planned for the summer that will take me to other localities.

I would go to you to-night if I could—away from the gas, and the glitter, and the tinkle of

things hollow—how we would talk away into the "wee sma' hours!" I think a good talk with you to-night would take from me a little of the tiredness that comes to us all at times. I have just got through with a piece of work I have been at for three months, and it has left me with a half feeling of elation, and a half sorrow at parting with its companionship. It has seemed for so long only my own, now it belongs to the public.

I say only my own, but I think, yes I am quite sure, it has seemed to belong partly to one other. I wonder if you, from your safe-guard of an ideal love that left earth too early for its human consummation, can understand a mortal like myself who never seems sure of an anchor? Yes, though it is unlike yourself, yet I think you will understand. You have understood me all my life—more than any other.

Do you remember the plans we used to make as to our lives when I would find a soul that was to me what my sister was to you? I think over those past hopes very, very often of late, and I wonder if that perfect love of yours and hers was exceptional in lives. I see nothing, have known nothing like it, and yet I have wanted, needed just such companionship often. If it could be given me, if only for a season, I believe I could be lifted above much in my own nature that is gross.

This looks like a confession of something more than usually evil in me; no, I do not intend it so. But to you I have ever gone, since as a dreamy,

untrained boy, I submitted to you my first lurid attempts at drama, my first efforts at verse or fiction; then I did not know enough to disguise from you my inner nature, and its complex wants, and now the knowledge that you understand and sympathize, brings me to you just the same. It may be my likeness to Julia has gained for me an affection from you that is closer than that of most men. But if a love for a woman and from a woman, such as I used to dream of, should ever have been mine, I think I would have gone to her as I do to you with these letters.

I suppose you are disapproving of this, that you say, "why do you not go to your *fianceé?*" And you are right, only earnest as my desire in that direction is for helpful companionship, I find only one side of my nature appealed to there, only one side of my nature cared for or understood. Do you think I am looking at it only from a selfish point of view? I am not altogether so bad as that. But I have slowly come to the conclusion that she needs me not at all. In fact, we could drift along contentedly together, but that we are necessary to each other—no.

Why then these relations? Well, for want of a pilot, souls drift into strange harbors. And when you questioned Alex Dorman of her, I think his words would help the explanation somewhat when he said, "well, Blanche is not so intellectual or strictly beautiful if you come to analyze her attractions, but she charms people." She is delightful in many ways, and I am irritated when

I leave her feeling a want unfulfilled, mentally or soulfully. Do I expect too much? I fear so. Your love, my cousin, has given me a glimpse of an ideal, and I feel myself and my own affections so far below it.

Should I try to explain this to Blanche, I can fancy her amusement as she would ask me how my money was lost, at cards or a horse-race. Well, I have been lord of myself in this affair, and have come to the conclusion I have a fool for my master.

I wrote in my last about the acquaintance I have made, by letter, of the artist who has illustrated my book just finished. I wish you were with me to-night, I think I could read you some of those letters received from her of late. Perhaps they would help show you the reason for this want of higher life, higher companionship. The letters began simply on business matters concerning the illustrations, and I am not sure I can tell you with pen and unresponsive paper just how I am affected by this sympathy with which she has entered into the spirit of my work—it has been a revelation to me—a puzzling pleasure. I seem in her thoughts to read a double of myself, but of myself purified, without the alloy that at times has seemed to weight me down. I find myself wondering much as to her personality, though I do not believe I ever want to see or know her save through those letters with their exquisite touches of feeling, and their width of vision that suggest the spectacles of sorrow. I

have an idea that she is not young. I do not know why I feel so, but her style of thought is not in my mind co-existent with the youth of woman. It is to me like the youth of a man before the world's evil has claimed him.

She is married, I know that by her title, but it is all I know of her life. Our letters have been of art, of books of my own work of which she told me faults, fearlessly. She tells me I have written too much for the pastime of others when I have material in me that should enable me to write for their good. Her letters have in them always those suggestions that bring back to me a youth in which I dreamed all wild visions of use and philanthropy, tinged with enough poetry to make them beautiful. Those untainted dreams of youth! they have drifted to me in a flood, of late days, when the letters of this woman came to me. She does not seem to see me as a woman, only a thing of mind and intuitive sympathies, and it is so that her influence is best.

I feel a half shame in writing that last—in writing you of any woman's influence over me. For you have known of other influences; some that spurred me to ambitions, too. But the ambitions that were as feverish as the effects of the late suppers, where my divinities for the time perished.

Well, old friend, I think you know I have tried to break loose from all that; tried to steer myself into the correct order of life since I am to be a benedict. Since I felt that another's future

was to depend on mine, I turned my back on the old bohemian style of life; I tried to put myself through a mental and moral purification. It was all done for the sake of another—not, I fear, for the sake of goodness. And gradually I have learned that my attempts in that line are not sympathized with as I had hoped they would be. They are treated in a half-jesting manner that has a mischievous disbelief in me emerging from any chrysalis of the past. I was just awaking to that revulsion of feeling, and I confess was smarting under a sense of irritation when this artist sent me the first of those letters that was in any sense personal—letters with the coolness that sooths and the warmth that stimulates. Letters that breathe of purity and strength as if from a soul that has had to struggle to keep them, and thus understand the needs of others.

It may have been just the coming of her faith in me, at a time when I was despondent over my reformatory attempts, that made such an impression on me—that lifted me, mentally, from the slough into which I had half stumbled.

Well, her present work, artistically, is done for me—or rather for the publisher, who really engaged her. Her last letter hints at multiplicity of work and possible change of address, that seems to put a veto on further correspondence. I am not sure that I am sorry, delightful as the exchange of thought has been. But I would not always be content to know her only by letter, and my ideal of her I would not risk having

shattered by a meeting, as I fear it would be. But, just as it is, I know it has helped me, and I am going to work, old fellow, with a vim born, I think, from one unknown woman's belief in me. Do not think me careless, my brother-cousin, of the faith you have always had in me. But you know me personally, and, through your liking, would give me belief. But this other—I think it is simply because there is no personal feeling in the matter—the knowledge that it is simply my work she cares for, that gives me the desire to make that work high and strong as her own ideas of excellence—ideas she has helped to make mine.

Her own work is strong and full of feeling. I send with this some proofs of work done for me; you are judge enough to know they are clever.

Am going to try dramatic work, soon as I have a little time. My play last season was only a semi-success, but I will not be satisfied until I have produced at least one play that will run. This summer I intend doing some work on an Indian theme of the past century, a half historical affair.

Blanche intends going to Europe this summer with her sister and brother-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Julian, so I will be left in bachelor freedom for many months longer. I have asked that the marriage be consummated now, at once. A contradiction you will say of many things in this letter; yes, but we are, after all, fond of each other, I think. We seem apart, but I fear that absence

will only drift us further in that direction. However, my suggestion on the question has been vetoed, so I settle down to work during her absence.

Write—write to me often from the seclusion of your village life. I write you to-night much as I would write in a journal that was for only my own reading—just as I used to write you. For the past few years I have drifted away from you a little, my life for awhile was not in keeping with your hopes of me; I know that it helped to cut off in part that old sweet intercourse that was ours when my sister and her influence was with us.

Well, my cousin, I feel that I am led back to the old walks and to you, and the soul that does it is, I think, akin to the soul of Julia, this woman whose name tells one nothing, Judith Holmes. Your prayers are of more avail than mine, remember her in them for my sake, will you not? That seems a strange request, but I ask it in all earnestness. There has been no hint of sorrow, or want of sympathy, in her letters, but I am filled with the thought that she knows unhappiness—that from some depth of pain, she has learned to read between the lines of other people's discontent. I am not sure whether I think of her as an ideal mother, or sister, or sweetheart; all seem blended in the soul I have gained a glimpse of.

Never mind if I run into extravagance of expression; that will tone down when I settle to

work and get a little used to this breath of youthful energy that has come back to me. Try and be a little glad with me.

Your cousin,
DALE.

THE PARSONAGE, GLENVALE, MASS.

MY DEAR DALE: Of course I am glad, and am thankful as you are to the woman who has helped me to be so. I am interested in her and her work; the latter is undeniably good. I have regretted that wandering of yours more than I would have expressed if you had not yourself brought up the subject, still you are not yet thirty. The feverish fascinations of worldly life and worldly loves seldom lose their hold on a man of your temperament so early, not unless he has the great help that is the lever of the world —Love—the love that exalts, that helps us to an understanding of what is best in our own hearts. You, in the early part of your career, sought such companionship of thought, though the search wandered into strange paths that offered alluring substitutes.

Your marriage will, I think, do more toward contenting you than you imagine now. You need an anchor, and a wife is a most excellent one. I believe it is the idea of your prospective union that has led you unconsciously into the train of thought that is with you now. The sympathy of this unknown nature has helped you to give

expression to it. But the germs were planted when you asked for the life companionship of the woman you are to marry.

I think this other lady—Mrs. Holmes—is an earnest, helpful nature, who, seeing the flaws in work that was otherwise good, had the courage to tell you so, setting aside the conventional for the sake of the useful. Men need that the world hold such women, and though you should not hear from her again, I shall endeavor to keep in your mind her interest in you.

Come to me here as soon as you choose, there is always a welcome for you. Come, I long to talk to you again as a boy. A boy who has seen, as in a vision, the folly and the soul sickness of illicit sweets—who knows them all, and yet turns so thankfully to the wholesome purities of home, the haven that abolishes either false stimulants or narcotics.

Yours, my boy, earnestly,

GEORGE.

CHAPTER III.

Some strange shame put weight upon my tongue, I only watched her.—*Fool's Revenge.*

A clatter and chatter sounded through the halls and along the verandahs of a hotel in Oyster Bay, Long Island, a summer hotel that closes its doors when the leaves fall, and only opens them again when the peach blossoms make the trees pink.

The young people in gay guise of lawn tennis and boating dress came trooping in under the trees at the lunch hour, and through them the man called Dale made his way to the hotel register, a half dozen girls fluttering away from the desk to give him room, and fluttering back again to glance at the signature when they thought him out of hearing.

"Dale Alison," chirruped one.

"Brooklyn," added another.

"Wonder what he is?"

"He looks like something."

"Something, that's definite, Grace."

"Oh, you know—something unusual."

"Yes, unusually tall."

"Or unusually handsome, perhaps?" This, sarcastically, from one of the girls who preferred blonde specimens of masculinity.

"No; you all understand what I mean. He looks like an actor, or a minister, or—well, something uncommon. No, he is not quite handsome, but he is striking, and his eyes are lovely! they seem to have so much *in* them."

"It's a hopeless case," said one, pathetically.

"Yes, love at first sight," ventured another.

"The seventh case in the two weeks since we've been here," said the girl called Grace, "forty-eight hours of unutterable love given to each."

"Proof of her devotion to Ouida. She is hunting for germs of passionate poetry in every man she sees, if he happens to look melancholy; this one looks bilious."

"Yes, a regular black and tan."

"He is not!"

"He is so!"

"He has a face an artist would use for Fra Lippo."

"Oh! oh! oh! Girls if any of you have historical knowledge of the gentleman mentioned, you can guage the bent of our friend's mind. I'm shocked!"

"So am I."

"We are all paralyzed with horror."

And immediately six girls dropped into grotesque positions, supposed to be paralytic, and bearing a slight resemblance to the attempts at posing made by the dragoons in "Patience."

"You all look extremely idiotic."

"Oh! she's getting personal."

"And vixenish!"

"Cause—unrequited love. But there he goes again."

"Which way?"

"Into the lunch room. Say, girls, I'm famished."

"So am I."

"Let's get at his table."

"The waiter won't let us."

"Yes, he will," decided Grace. "I'll smile on him. Come on, all but Laura, she's tabooed because of her susceptible nature. Come along. I'm trying to rack my brains to remember where I've heard his name before. I wish Tom was here, or even papa, I'm sure they would know him."

"There, there! that will do, you schemer, trying to pick up an acquaintance on the strength of the idea that possibly Tom knows him. That is rather a transparent affair, try another."

"Stop jabbering and come to lunch," advised one of the more practical creatures.

And so the new-comer ate his lunch with what solemnity he could, feeling five pairs of girlish eyes exchanging glances as freely as they had exchanged remarks concerning him. A gay, careless lot they were, let loose from the environments of city life to run wild for a season over the sands, and dabble in the waves of the sea shore. Forward, audacious, with the audacity of youth that means no harm.

A pleasant, cheery dining-room, with the glimpses of the close green through the windows, and a good lunch with the *vis-a-vis* of a bright, piquant face, running over with mischief, is apt to make life seem like a thing worth living to a man, and this one whom the girl called Fra Lippo, seemed to enjoy it.

But in the midst of the hum and the chatter of people passing in and out a woman's figure caught his eye as it moved slowly toward him down the dining-room—a form in white with a scarf over her arm.

"Ah! a Francesca," he thought, as the slim, girlish figure in dead white stood out in the midst of the gay stripes and bright gowns. But as she came closer the face did not look so girlish as the figure. The eyes had in them a tinge of sadness,

as if of knowledge, and yet something of the wistfulness of a child.

Was it that wistfulness that drew his eyes to hers? he could scarcely tell. But whatever the attraction was, his attention seemed to have some mesmeric effect on the lady. She glanced toward him, casually, and the next instant her eyes widened just a little, her lips parted as one who would say "You?"

And before he could assure himself that he was really the object of that subtle recognition, her eyes dropped, she turned deliberately to a side table, and a view of a clear-cut profile and eyes never turned toward himself was all he could see in the mirror opposite him—one in which he did not dare look too often, because of at least one pair of girlish eyes that had noticed that exchanged glance and was on the alert.

"She's prettier than ever to-day, isn't she?" whispered one of the girls, and he pricked up his ears thinking to hear her name.

"Oh, she is too white for a live woman," said another; "with that bronze hair she needs color."

"Well, she isn't afraid of the tan, anyway," said a third, "for we met her on the bay alone this morning, rowing without gloves, and only a Tam-o'-Shanter on her head, and you know how little *they* keep the sun off."

"And she can row, too. Harry Canord, who was with us, watched her through a glass until she landed, and he raved over her figure."

"Ma says it looks masculine for a woman to go out like that in a boat alone."

"But she is not masculine; her voice is the softest contralto."

"But she goes everywhere alone."

"Well, she hasn't been here long, and doesn't seem to know people; but that should not make her unfeminine. I'm in love with her."

And mentally Alison jotted down the last speaker in his whitest book of memory, for the sake of the pure profile of unchangeable Greek outline.

The girls, in their new subject, seemed to have thoroughly forgotten the mischief that had sent them to the stranger's table, barring out Laura, who had to sit demurely beside an elderly aunt and watch her chums devour cold chicken at the table, with her interesting specimen of melancholy, a melancholy that she must have concluded originated from hunger, as she was disillusioned by seeing him eat like a ploughman, his eyes gaining an amused gleam as the girls chattered on, never hesitating at personalities, each ravenous from the salt air, and regretting that it was not dinner, because of some confections and fruits that were a feature of the dessert.

The woman in white—he had already christened her—left the lunch-room early, and he sauntered out after as soon as he could in any decency. Why did she look at him like that? She had aroused his curiosity, and then vanished. There were plenty of white dresses to be seen on people

both thin and fat, but no Francesca. And passing the open window he noticed that the girl Laura had joined her companions, and taken his place at the table, where they laughed and gossiped, evidently discussing himself and his unsentimental appetite.

A little later a servant entered, carrying to their table a great dish of fruit and confectionery, over which he would answer no questions. "For the young ladies," that was all he knew. And one of the party found a card among the candies, there was a little shriek of horror, a moment of suspense, and then, an awe-struck whisper, "*From Fra Lippo!*"

"Oh, he must have heard; we were so near the window."

"How mean of him to listen."

"How sweet and forgiving to send the candies."

"Just my favorites."

"Say, girls, don't tell Harry."

"Do you think us silly enough for that? He's a regular darling!"

"Who? Harry or the other one?"

"Why, Fra Lippo of course."

And so the lunch ended, and the new-comer sauntered around the village streets, putting in the time carelessly, aimlessly, while waiting the boat that was to take him next day to the other end of the island.

He went out along the street that crosses the little bridge where the wild roses grow, and the water falls in a foam below over the stones; out

along the road where vines of the wood drape the trees and form almost an arbor until at the end of the wild hedge, an old mill stands, gray and dusty, near the shore, and the bath houses away along the sand where the people float and splash through the days of the summer.

And he, sitting on the grass by the mill-race, watching the old miller throw corn to the ducks in the clear, brown water, forgot the Francesca who had puzzled him; forgot the chatter of the girls who had amused him, and drifted into memories of the past, and air castles of the future—so close those two are, and so easily conjured up by the drowsy hum of an early summer day. But into even Eden crept the serpent, and across the pastoral air of the fields, and the hills, and the fragrance of apple blossoms, the laugh of a woman came to him—one that made him stir uneasily as he lay there on the grass. It struck him with the memory of a thing to which he had once given the name of love, and which he knew now was but a shell without soul.

But the shells are shifted so by the tides of life, and ever and anon we stumble across them, and look at them a little wonderingly to think they still exist. But we do not care to take in our hands the thing we once kissed into life, we only turn our heads away with the regret that murmurs the "has been;" that echoes ever through such shells of the past passion of the sea deeps.

And Alison stirred uneasily that day in the grasses when he heard that woman's laugh. At

the latter end of a dinner, when the time has come for the fruits and dessert, one wonders, with a little feeling of distaste, at an appetite for soup, which, in the beginning, we found delightful, but which one has outgrown, for the time.

Something like that thought came to him as he lay there, and he pulled his hat over his eyes to keep out the sun—sunlight is so searching, and men's souls shrink from the truth of it sometimes—and the echo of that laugh had sent back a reflection that made him a little tired at heart.

The steps of a party came over the beach and the long grass toward him, and one of them, the most airy of the lot, stopped suddenly at the edge of the road with a little cry of amazement at the long limbs and hidden face there on the sward. There are, of course, so many long limbs in the world; but when one has known any one pair so well they are likely to carry a sense of individuality, no matter what strange garb encases them. And a moment's glimpse seemed to satisfy the pert, quick-stepping creature, for she motioned the others — two women and three men — to silence.

"Go on to the hotel without me, I know him —no," as they attempted to dissuade her, "I'll tell you the truth, I do know him, long, oh so long ago; so it is no new affair, those are all you have need to be jealous of, you goose! Go along, do!"

And then she tip-toed over the sward, and lifting the hat forced him to look up into her eyes—

eyes as blue as the seas from which the empty shells are dashed.

"I have found you," she said, dropping down beside him, her hand on his shoulder. "Oh don't look vexed, I don't want you. I know when I'm given the go-by, and you did it royally, Alison. Yes, you did, and I had a glorious time on the morning you left me, and I'm glad to shake hands and say how are you. Come, let by-gones be by-gones."

"Of course," he said, a little lamely. "How well you are looking, Hettie. Are you stopping here at the Bay?"

"If I am, you mean that you will leave, do you?" she asked, bluntly. "No, I've only come over from Shelter Island for a few days. There is a party of us; you may know some of the men. Come around to the hotel this evening, will you?"

"I—I think not," he answered, even while he lay there thinking what an alluring picture she made in the blue and pink of her boating dress, and the face like a flower—a very knowing blossom of a nineteenth century summer; one that knew the value of rich loam in the shape of coins from the mint. A clever little creature, who had been attractive to him once through her very frankness that made no pretenses of innocence, and so, perforce, left a man well satisfied with himself, with no remorse for a spoiled life, or for helping her down a single step on life's ladder. She never had seemed to realize that she had been

helped down, and any man who has gone through the alternate fits of ecstacy and remorse of a passion that enjoys and repents, can tell what a rest a companionship is over which he need not waste regrets except for lost time.

But sitting there looking at her he thought again of the soup that we vote distasteful at the end of a dinner.

"All right," she said cheerily, at his refusal to join her party, "I know you never did care much for crowds. Who is with you here? no one! that's all wrong. You look lonesome."

"Not at all," he said, rather hastily, "I am working these days, writing. No more time for the careless days and nights when—when we knew each other."

"Yes," she said, easily, "I hear you are going in for the correct thing and matrimony; when am I to congratulate you?"

"If you mean my marriage, not for some time," he said, a little irritated at having to discuss this question with this woman; and yet, how much he had shared his time with this woman, in a past that was not so very far away.

"I don't believe I shall at all," she continued, reflectively. "I think it is a mistake—marriage. It ties one too tight. Leave it alone, Alison, you are too good a fellow to be spoiled."

"Thanks, but as the advice is a little late, suppose we change the subject; who are you with, here?"

She looked at him slyly from under her long

lashes, with vanity uppermost; her thought was: "Is he sorry? He did use to be fond of me; is he jealous, after all?" But aloud she said: "with some people from Chicago—a jolly party—and the gayest of times. Do come along."

She lounged toward him on the grass, her hand on his shoulder, very near to his neck were the little, pink, soft fingers. But he lay there unmoved, smiling up at her quizzically, but shaking his head ever so slightly. "Get thee behind me, Satan," he quoted, even while his hand touched those little fingers; was it to clasp them closer? it no doubt looked so, but in reality it was to lift the hand firmly from its resting-place and lay it good-naturedly on her own knee.

"It looks better there," he remarked, "especially as this is an out-door scene and audiences are likely things."

"Were you always so afraid of audiences?" she half pouted; and then again the fair pink face was dropped low over his own; "Then why not come where there is no one about?"

She never was answered, for as he rose on his elbow to speak, he saw over the shoulder of the pink and blue nymph, a figure that had evidently been sitting by the old mill but a short distance away. A slim figure in white with a garden hat on its head, a sketch-book in its hand and a great deal of contemptuous scorn in its eyes, as it stood just an instant gazing across at him, and then deliberately turned and walked away.

"What is wrong?" asked the girl looking

at him. "Did you see a ghost? Who is that woman?"

"I do not know who she is," he answered half sulkily.

"Come now, be honest."

"I tell you the truth," he reiterated, with a decision akin to anger. "I do not even know her name. But as I remarked before, this is not exactly the place for scenes. I propose we move."

He rose without waiting for any remark and stalked out toward the sandy road, the girl following him, a little crest-fallen, a little sulky. Up along the path toward an orchard the white figure was moving steadily, unconscious that a few leaves from the portfolio had dropped on the grass by the bars, and lay there tremulous in the sea breeze. Alison crossed the road and picked them up; the first was a pencil sketch of the old mill, the second was a half-finished one of Hettie's form as she bent toward him, her hand on his shoulder, it might even be thought to be around his neck, for his face could not be seen from the artist's point of view, only the long limbs on the sward, and an elbow showing past the curve of the girl's waist. A pair of lovers any one would have thought them, as no doubt the artist had. But it was only when she saw his face that she had risen indignant.

"What the deuce does she mean by making a fellow feel uncomfortable with such looks and such a manner?" he thought, grumpily, "why

should she look so surprised? I've no doubt she stumbles over many such scenes at the Bay."

Then he turned over the last slip of paper. It was not a sketch, but a letter, the heading was that of a publishing house, one he knew well.

And the address on it was Judith Holmes.

CHAPTER IV.

It is safe to say that the rest of the day was not a comfortable one to Dale Alison. All the soft beauty of the day was gone; every nook, every cranny was filled with some phantom of fancy, all laughing idiotically at the horrible incongruity of that woman's hopes of him, of his own half promises to her, and then the scene she had witnessed! For Hettie and her party had no doubt made themselves conspicuous features during their stay at the Bay, and there could not be much doubt of their class. The heat of shame tingled through his blood as he remembered sentences in those letters that had expressed so much faith in his ideas, in his work. How vividly they stood out in his mind! How they would recur again and again as he lay in his room at the hotel, staring rather vacantly at the wall-paper, on which were grotesque Chinese figures that grinned back at him like little demons.

The look in her eyes was one he did not care to

remember; it made him forget how fine the eyes were. All at once he seemed placed on too low a plane for either admiration or criticism of her personality. He had thought of her for so long, wondering what she was like; how those kind words of her letters would sound if she gave voice to them. And now he knew that she thought of him with such disgust, with such disappointment that those kind letters, those helpful words would never come to him again.

That thought brought him to his feet like a shot. All his new ambitions that had been thronging close to him of late seemed tinged with hopelessness since the inspiration of them had slipped out of reach. A flash of light into some inner soul thrilled him with the knowledge that his energies had been bent by that woman's faith, not by his own needs, and that the mental support given him had been stronger than he had guessed until it was withdrawn.

"What will it matter, after all?" he tried to reason in half-irritable fashion, as he tramped from one window to another, aimlessly looking out on moving forms, his eyes searching instinctively for one face; "it will all be forgotten this time next year—the woman and her influence."

So he lied to himself, as men will, trying to reason himself out of the burning embarrassment, the horrible incongruity the day had given birth to. But with all the life in him he knew that he longed to keep that influence and regain that regard.

The sheets from the portfolio lay on the table by his hat. He picked them up, glancing at the figure of himself half hidden by Hettie's airy draperies.

"Curse the luck!"

It is quite an orthodox prayer on lips masculine, I believe, if luck grows contrary on their hands, and how natural to shift the responsibilities of life unto the irresponsible ones of Fate. The ill-luck was not that he should have met Mrs. Holmes in the rural surroundings of a country road and a flour mill, but that his life had known companionship of which he was ashamed.

"This sort of thing won't do," he reasoned, finally; "those things must be returned to her, of course."

After reaching that conclusion, the question was to determine how they should be returned, personally or by messenger. The latter would entail less embarrassment, but after the exchange of thought that had been between them, how could their acquaintance be let end so. A protest against that surged through his thoughts. "And I owe her so much, so much," he muttered, feeling his debt, and that he had paid her by lowering her faith in that which she wanted to believe. A man of the world? Yes, so he was thought, but the next morning he felt more like a novice making his first independent call on a lady, as he left his room to return the tell-tale bits of paper to their owner, whose hand he had longed so

often to clasp, and he wondered now if she would say even "How do you do."

As for the lady herself, she smiled at the white card with the signature she had learned to know so well.

"I will see him," she said, and when alone she again looked curiously at the signature.

"I do not *think* there can be danger in seeing him, now," she debated, cynically, and then she leaned back, laughing a little, "Oh, my useless sacrifice to duty and ideals!" she breathed, with sarcastic fervor, "and, oh, my last remnant of faith in the noble animal—man. I ended the correspondence because it was growing so much too interesting. But—yes, I *think* I can see him now without danger to my susceptible heart."

And Alison, waiting with an uncertain feeling in the little reception room, saw her draw aside the curtains, and noticed that little upward curve of the corners of her mouth—the face not at all the scornful one of yesterday. That smile made him feel almost as uncomfortable as the disdain. It took from him in an instant all the feeling of penitence, and he arose feeling much more assured of his self-possession. No, he need not be afraid of his reception, for she held out her hand.

"Mr. Alison—at last," were the smiling, courteous, and provocative words he heard first from her lips. They were so carelessly pleasant, they had such an entire disregard of any former meeting, that the coolness of it took him a little aback.

"I am most happy that you allow it to be at

last," he said, holding her hand an instant, "I have wanted to know you personally for so long."

"So long?" she repeated, smilingly, "why you have not known of my existence a year."

"But one can live so much in a year sometimes," he said, and wished while he did so that she would drop that coolly smiling way of hers, and look a little more like the Francesca of yesterday. It is so annoying to one's vanity to be treated as a joke.

"Can one?" she queried, in answer to that remark of his. "Yes, I think you are right, only every year gets shorter as we grow old."

"I imagined it was happiness, not age, that made the years short."

"I can not agree with you from experience," she returned, "happiness has not as yet shortened them for me, whatever age has done."

It was the only sentence that had in it a single serious tone, and he wondered if it was because she had known happiness so little. But an instant more and she was chatting of the scene visible through the open window—a bit of green bay and blue sky, mellowed into accord by the sunlight—of the many advantages of the little town as a summer resort.

"I have been here only three days," she said in answer to his question, "I am waiting for some friends to join me here. Lonely? Oh, no. I am never that. You know I am a worker, not one of the idle lilies of the field, and my work is seldom

laid aside in my holidays; and for diversion, I walk and row, and—sketch sometimes."

There was just a trifle of hesitation in this last remark, he could not tell if it was through embarrassment or roguishness, but glancing at her she looked so perfectly calm that it irritated him into saying, bluntly, "I never expected to meet you like this." "Like this?" with a slight rise of dark brows. "I mean with this—this sort of an atmosphere. It—pardon my presumption—it is not that of our correspondence."

"No," with an inflection that matched the eyebrows; "but it is all different, you know; those letters were, I think, from the mind of each to the art of each. There was no question of personalities. All that is changed when we meet people. Before we did not seem like real people, we were only ideas."

"And now that you know me, I am not the sort of a person with whom you care to exchange ideas!"

There was a sort of doggedness in his persistence to know the worst, and something akin to it came when she said coolly:

"But I can not say that I know you yet, Mr. Alison."

For a little there was silence. He knew he deserved it, yet felt himself impelled to a continuance of that to which she had virtually given a veto.

"A month ago you knew me—in part," he blundered, "only you have forgotten."

"I seldom forget," she answered quietly; "but

a month ago is a month ago, and our knowledge of each other by letter was really but a one-sided affair; we each, I think, gave to the other an impression of what we thought we were. That is, I think, what letters amount to generally. But when we meet personally, we must begin all over again in the conventional way, seeing each other with one's own vision, and it makes a difference —sometimes."

She laughed slightly at the last sentence. But he could not even smile with her, he only said:

"You are so much disappointed in me?"

"How persistent the man is?" she thought; "it would be a bore, but that his humility is so charmingly awkward, it fits him so ill," but aloud, she said:

"No, I could not well be that, your late work is good, I think, very good. You are writing with a purpose now, one I hope will gain the end you have in view, whatever it is."

There came to him the impulse to tell her the thoughts he had since he saw her yesterday, the certainty that the end in view was, in a great part, her approval, that without her faith his ambition staggered, and felt itself without a goal. And then he could have laughed aloud at an impulse so absurd as he looked at her face so carelessly non-committal, and knew that all his hopes of helpful friendship were ended through the level glances she gave him, and her refusal to meet him on the footing their letters had built.

He seemed in the midst of a chaotic wreck of thought, he felt his veins tingling, as with a scourge, while he sat there. A scourge plaited of reeds, through which a soulless passion had whistled in a season so dead; they come back always in some form, these passions, and whatever music their song is set to, the refrain is always—regret.

"We seem to have only my own work to discuss," he said, at last, "but what of yours, are you doing any now?"

She looked at him a moment, thinking wickedly in woman fashion, "Yes, it will serve him right," and rang a little bell, that was answered by an old colored woman, who courtsied when she saw the stranger, and asked, "Whah tis, Miss Jude?"

"Bring me the small, blue portfolio, Lisa, it is on the table in my room," she said, with more tenderness of tone and glance than she had seemed to possess; and when it was brought, she turned over the loose sheets until she found an ornamental heading of shells and sea-weed that outlined the word "Mizpah." She handed it to him in silence.

"My poem," he said, in wondering, half-shamed surprise, "I—I did not think of publishing that."

"No? But that need not deter one from making sketches if there are pictures in a bit of writing. I have often done that for practice, and I did so with this."

"It is not worth such exquisite work," he said

quietly, "I sent it with those manuscripts, but never thought it worth publication."

"I am not sure of that," she said, in an argumentative manner, "I do not believe you know it, though you did write it. Have you ever read it aloud?"

"No, I never have," he answered, wonderingly.

"Then, of course, you do not know it," she decided, "Here it is, read it aloud and see if you don't make its acquaintance over again."

"Why, what difference—"

"I am not sure what it is, the literary merit of it may not be high; you seem to judge it from that standpoint, but there was something I liked in it when read aloud."

"You might help me to see its beauties, if you would not mind reading it to me."

It was a bold sally after the rebuffs he had met. He really did not care much about the article, scarcely remembering any thoughts in it. But the desire for any subject of conversation in which there would be no jarring element made him desperate.

She looked at him for an instant in surprise, surprise that was quickly hidden, however, as she said, in a most matter-of-fact way, "Oh, certainly, I may not read well, but it possibly will help give you the impression I spoke of, and help you to believe it worth my sketches."

He nodded understandingly, without speaking, and turned his eyes out toward the sea, instead of

toward her face, as she read, in a subdued tone, his bit of verse:

"Mizpah! here our lives drift wider asunder,
Why? or whence? ah me, the vain endeavor
Of sad lips to answer what the heart asks!
Close through stormy weather have our hands clasped,
And our life-boat rode the waves in laughter;
Naught to us the storms—we had each other!
And glad eyes kept darkness far beyond us.
Now the waves seem lulled to rest forever,
And life's sea in smoothest tones invites us;
On we move—but, ah, my friend, the pity!
Two boats now drift outward to the ocean,
And the water, clear as crystal, mirrors
Two tired faces and sad eyes that see not;
Back we dare not look, for there is floating
In our wake a corpse, the thing that lightened
All our lives is lifeless; and love's music
Only comes to listening ears in echoes
Of a dear, dead happiness. Above us
Brassy skies are burning; outward drift we,
With no hope of green isles in our future.
Coral reefs there may be, and false beacons
Oft lure tired lives. What *is*, is written,
Here we raise our monument, moan 'Mizpah,'
And drift down, alone, life's unknown vistas."

He did not speak for a little after she ceased reading. He had forgotten what prompted that bit of verse; he rather thought it the outgrowth of a fancy he had for trying different constructions of verse, and the theme had been a sort of chance affair. But hearing it read in those warm, deep tones, gave it a new meaning to him.

"It is musical," he agreed; "yes, when *you* read it; and I had thought it nothing—only a fragment."

"It suggested the sketches at any rate," she answered, and watched him as he took up the larger drawing, two shallops drifted apart by the winds of the sea, the occupants—a man and a woman—reaching hands longingly toward each other, all the mistiness of the horizon forming a background for the intense faces turned each to each.

"It is beautiful," he said, earnestly.

"Which, the poem or the sketch?" she asked as curiously as though she had not seen his eyes grow pleased over her work.

"Your sketch, you know I mean that," and his tone was slightly impatient. It vexed him to hear her speak to him in a superficial way, when through all her work there breathed earnestness. It was as if she deemed him too far below comprehension of the earnestness of life or expression. "The illustrations might sell the poem, but without it, my fragment of verse would never be noticed."

"Well," she said, half jestingly, "when you find yourself longing for the fame of Poesy, send to me for the sketches and verse."

"I may take you at your word sometime," he answered, "you have given me an interest in the lines I had almost forgotten; when I send for them, remember the promise."

Long after they both remembered that carelessness of conversation, both so unconscious of the significance of the poem that was in part a prophecy.

But just then the verse and the sketch had brought a tinge of earnestness into their little scene that Mrs. Holmes hastened to drive into the background by asking of the theatres, asking what was new, discussing what was old.

"I have seen so little, my home has been mostly in the country," she said, appealing to his judgment in some matter of metropolitan life.

"And you like the repose of it best," he asked, hoping to find a theme congenial.

"Y–e–s," in a hesitating way, "that is, in the season of green leaves. But repose so often means monotony. It is delightful in pictures and poems of course. But elevated roads are so convenient."

And in despair he gave up, and bade her good-morning, feeling almost as if the day had been a failure.

"May I come to see you again, before I leave?" he asked, at parting.

And again she thought, "how persistent the man is;" but said, "certainly, I would be glad to have you meet my friends, the Winans, a lovely old-young couple, my closest friends. If your other duties will allow you time, we should like to have you to dinner with us to-morrow."

He could see that he was asked to meet her friends, not herself. But he said, concisely:

"I have no duties here, few anywhere, and I will come," and then he held out his hand. It seemed out of tune with all his former fancies to leave her less cordially.

"I want to tell you," he said, stubbornly, "how much you have helped me through those letters. I—I tell you this because I—well, it seems as if some way our acquaintance has a tone so different from our correspondence, and it is to me a regret. Your influence—"

"My influence!" she broke in softly, ironically; "I rather think the imagination that is so admirable in your work is rather strained when applied to my influence. Do not you?" and she glanced at him amusedly.

"I do not; it is not imagination. The lack of that most pleasant friendship is more than a regret, it is a loss. I would like you to believe I am in earnest."

And then he was gone. She dropped into a chair by the window, smiling still. That quizzical gleam in her eyes was the last he had seen of her, and it had made him blunder a little over the words that he yet spoke so determinedly.

And as she sat there trying to make herself believe that she cared only to laugh, she saw him pass out across the lawn, his hat pulled rather low over his eyes. As she watched the tall figure saunter down toward the beach, her lips curled a little, but softened to whisper:

"It is a pity; I am sorry; yes, it is a pity."

She brought her drawing and went to work at the window, but some way did not make much headway. Her eyes wandered so often down toward the water. It was not a day for work,

and she had just determined to go for a walk when the colored boy again appeared.

"This for you, Mrs. Holmes, with Mr. Alison's compliments."

This was a large, flat envelope, and with it a scribbled card:

"I called to return these, but some way forgot my errand.—DALE ALISON."

These were the words, and opening the envelope she found the lost letter and sketches of yesterday. She glanced at that of the two figures, and then out on the bay where a solitary boat was foaming through the water to a hazy shore of the mainland. She even picked up a glass and watched through it a coatless figure holding a rudder grimly in one hand and a most plebeian-looking short pipe in the other. She dropped the glass with a little laugh.

"I wondered how we should meet, or what we should think of each other if we ever did. Well, all things come to those who wait. I have waited. It all seems like a whimsical bit of comedy that ventures just to the edge of seriousness."

And then the thoughts scarcely seemed worth formation, for she sat with half-closed eyes, still and lazy in the shadow of the curtain. But her face in repose was no longer cynical; tired, almost wistful, were the eyes that held in them the elements of tragedy more surely than the tinsel and brusquerie of comedy.

And out on the Sound the sky grew overcast, and the wind rose—the east wind that moans

always because of its bondage to tears. And into the teeth of it swept the little boat of the man who threw, at times, grim, backward glances toward the southern shore.

"Not nearly so romantic as her idea of Mizpah," he muttered, as he ducked for a short tack and drew in sail.

But some way, the vision of those parted boats would persist in floating their shapely timbers over the same waters that tossed his own craft out—out from the shore where she had laughed.

CHAPTER V.

Three weeks later two ladies sat on the shady side of a steamer that was plowing its way over the waters of the Sound, past Greenport, up past the ripple of the Narrows where the waters meet, on around the curves and the cliffs of Shelter Island, across the mouth of Peconic Bay, and toward the old-time whaling port of Sag Harbor.

The one lady was Alison's Francesca, Mrs. Holmes. The other was a dainty little blossom of a woman, her dress the gray of her hair. A charming old lady, with the instincts of a little coquette peeping through the quaint daintiness of lace frills, caressing the shining patent-leather shoe.

"You are really not taking a vacation at all," she was saying, in a debating tone, to the younger

woman, who only smiled at her. "You have been working hard at your drawings six hours of every day since we came to the island. Do you call that a vacation? You are really not strong enough to work like that."

"Do not judge me by your own fragile little self," advised the other; "you seem to imagine because I am not a stout, red-cheeked creature, that I must perforce be a weakling. I am sure I rowed you two miles for lilies yesterday, and brought you home without being too much exhausted to eat my own share of supper. What further proof do you want of my vitality?"

"That is all very well," nodded the little lady, "but one of the last things Lisa told me before starting for Carolina was to try to keep an eye on you; that you have not been sleeping well; that you are restless at night, and nervous, and—"

"So that is the cause of this little lecture, is it?" queried the other; "Lisa has been foolish enough to exaggerate my restlessness of a few nights into a serious affair for your consideration. I am rather glad the dear old creature has gone back to her people for these few weeks; she is growing fanciful in her old age."

"Well, of course, she is likely to be over anxious, since she is so attached to you. But she must have some foundation for those statements."

"You should not be credulous enough to take Lisa's tales at her own worth, Mrs. Winans," returned the younger woman; "Lisa has conjured up lock-jaw for me out of a pricked finger, and

brain fever out of a headache as long as I can remember."

"But if you are so well, what is the reason you are not sleeping?" persisted the little lady.

"Happiness, my dear," was the calm reply.

"Happiness?" was the doubtful query.

"Certainly, a supreme content in the mere fact of existence—a content so overwhelming that I lie awake o' nights to think of it."

The suggestion of the unexpressed in the last speech was as a wall over which there seemed no easy passage. In silence they sat for a little while, and then the old lady dropped her hand gently on the arm of the other.

"Don't worry, dear," she said, softly, "you are too young to know heavy weights of trouble."

"Too young?" and the repetition had a tinge of bitterness; "is one ever too young for that? My heaviest troubles came four years ago. They are mostly over now. I am alone, and that itself is a boon."

"It seems unnatural for a young person to look on life like that," remonstrated Mrs. Winans; "I will never be content until I see your life made what woman's life should be, one of home, love, and companionship."

Mrs. Holmes pressed the little gray-gloved hand lovingly, even while she said: "Stop just where you are, you chronic match-maker! Let me get what content freedom holds—and it is so much to one who has been in prison."

Just then a gentleman joined them, a portly,

burly individual, who settled down by the old lady like an elephant beside a little, gray dove.

"Well, little woman, how is it?" he asked, referring to the beauty of the Sound, with its lovely patches of irregular shores, "bracing, eh? And how is our little captain? Glad you came, ain't you? I tell you this breeze is a tonic."

"Yes," agreed his wife. "But you, major, always come booming around more like a hurricane than a breeze. Do try and be a little more restful."

"Can't, my dear. If I was restful I would have to deprive myself of tobacco, and buy anti-fat medicine instead. I've just been tramping the upper deck with the mate until I'm pretty well blown, and came down here for a quiet breath."

"But you do not allow yourself to take it quietly," said Mrs. Holmes, slyly; and the old gentleman laughed good-naturedly.

"Ah! you know me little captain, don't you? I suppose I seldom do stop chatting long enough to take breath. But I just heard something of our Oyster Bay friend, Mr. Alison."

"He is not an 'Oyster Bay' friend," corrected Mrs. Winans. "How can we call him that when his mother and I were friends before he was born, and I have actually held him in my arms as a babe."

"Oh, you have, have you?" growled her husband with intense ferocity. "Only let me see him in your arms, that's all."

"And so," continued his wife, not noticing the interruption, "and so we can not call him merely a sea-side acquaintance. I really like him too well to drop him that way."

"Um, hum!" grunted her husband. "The only comfort I have in this case is that the gentleman does not reciprocate, for he most assuredly was not too much infatuated to drop you, after one dinner together," and he chuckled maliciously and confidentially to Mrs. Holmes.

"That is a most unkind, uncalled for remark," announced his wife, "isn't it, Judith? He had to leave because of business; he said so, and I am sure he is too honest to resort to fibs."

"Fibs *is* scarcely the word," assented the major, "there is a stronger one used sometimes that might fit such cases."

"Major!"

"I always know when she says 'major' in that tone that it is time to get behind a barricade. Say, little captain, let me get behind you?"

"Instead of beating a retreat, you had better enlighten us as to Mr. Alison's perfidy," suggested Mrs. Holmes, anxious to settle this amicable quarrel.

"Certainly, with pleasure, with decided pleasure, since it may squelch an infatuation dangerous to domestic felicity; squelch is not an elegant word, but it is handy," he explained. "But to proceed: You remember an evening a few weeks ago when you invited a journalistic friend, not an Oyster Bay acquaintance, to dine with us?

And you, little captain, may remember the dead-set made at his rakish charms by my spouse; its no use, Mrs. Winans, to tell me how handsome he is. Can you expect me to see anything charming in the destroyer of my peace? And you remember how she hunted up a buried friendship with his departed mamma? The poor lady could not come from her grave to deny it, and she meanly took advantage of that fact. Well, my dear, it was *not* strictly honorable; and in fact, she at once began laying out such a route of rides and sails at which he saw he would have to act as escort, and at once convenient business was pleaded, and served to call him to some unmentioned quarter."

"I really do not see the necessity of all this preamble," remarked his wife slightingly.

"I am studying dramatic effect, my dear, and working up to the climax where truth confronts its opposite; and you are informed that your sombre Lothario has been waiting around these shores ever since, almost within a stone's throw of you, yet escaped your eagle glance. What do you say to that?"

"It's a—a mistake, surely," answered his wife; "you have been misinformed."

"Oh no, I have not," returned the major, easily, "the mate knows him, and tells me he made the trip to Sag Harbor yesterday on this steamer, and the chances are you will have an opportunity to confront him with his deceit; that is, if he don't see you first."

"Judith; do you hear this? Do you believe it?" demanded little Mrs. Winans, blankly.

"Oh yes; I believe all I hear; I don't know any better."

It was the first comment she had as yet made, and neither imagined that her silence meant anything but indifference.

"And I had such faith in those honest eyes of his," said the little lady, lamentingly.

"I see no reason for a loss of faith," remarked Mrs. Holmes; "give him the benefit of the doubt, re-instate your idol until you hear the evidence. He is a worker. An inspiration may have necessitated his withdrawal from the giddy crowd for a season. Your devotion is weak if it doubts on the circumstantial."

"Judith, you are a darling!"

"Little captain, you're a traitor."

"Of course he has much to do," assented Mrs. Winans; "much quiet study to produce those beautiful stories of his. *He* has no need to take anti-fat remedies because of inexertion."

"I rather think," said the major, reflectively, to Mrs. Holmes, "that to win back her affection, I shall have to write a novel myself, or a poem. She dotes on poems, and there I'll get ahead of him, for I don't believe he does anything but plain, every-day prose. My mind is made up; *I'll* write a poem."

"And I will illustrate it."

"It's a bargain! You owe some penance in this affair, because you invited him to that dinner,

and over it she remembered that she had once held him in her arms, and from that moment dates—well, if my happiness is buried forever, I will lay the blame at your door."

"Major," said his wife, briskly, "on our arrival you must go at once to the hotels and see if Mr. Alison is still here, and if so, bring him to see us, bring him to see me."

"I'll entice him down to the harbor and drop him in," confided the major to Mrs. Holmes.

But on landing at the dock they found themselves all at sea about hotels. They had taken it for granted that in a quiet, non-society place like Sag Harbor it would be easy to get accommodations. But some "high jink," as the major termed it, had brought the neighboring fire departments into the little place, and with them an influx of visitors that had taken possession of the hotels. "Everything full," was the response from all quarters.

"I feel like getting full myself," grunted the major, sitting down disconsolately on the steps of the hotel, whose proprietor offered them any amount of space a week ahead, but now—no, it was impossible to accommodate even the ladies.

"My one comfort in this," remarked Mrs. Holmes, "is that Lisa is safe down in the piney woods. If she was here she would simply howl, or chant Methodist hymns to give vent to her feelings at having no roof to cover her."

"Judith, you always know the right thing to

do at the right time," said Mrs. Winans, flatteringly; "do tell us what to do now."

"Suppose we hire a boat and live on the bay," was the brilliant suggestion that met only glances of disdain from the others, and the major sadly drew a railroad schedule out of his satchel, preparatory to leaving the town.

"I think I can help you to something better than that, if you will allow me," said a voice inside the window beside which they sat forlornly.

"Mr. Alison," breathed Mrs. Winans, gratefully, "come out of that office at once and shake hands with me, and tell us where we can pitch our tents."

And a moment later he was shaking hands heartily with the major and his wife, and as earnestly, if in silence, with Mrs. Holmes.

"I forgive you for hiding around the corner of the island," said the old lady, magnanimously. "I accept any excuse for you running away, if you will only come to our rescue now."

"With the assurance of your continued favor all things are easy," he answered, gallantly, and then turned to the major. "Come along," he said briskly, "and come quick, or some one else may be ahead of us. I have found a haven out along the shore road, and there may be room for your party. Let me show the ladies into the parlor here, and then I am at your service."

But the ladies preferred the open porch and view of the old village street where the names of

Portugese and Lascar swung on many signs under which the native of the soil—the Indian—still does his trading.

"Is it not providential, our meeting him?" asked Mrs. Winans.

"Wait until you have seen the results," suggested Mrs. Holmes, dryly. "Your faithless swain may not after all be a conqueror of hotel-keepers, though he is of susceptible hearts."

"Judith, you are as bad as the major—worse, for I do believe you have a prejudice against that fine fellow, though you did illustrate his book so beautifully. Come, own up."

"What shall I acknowledge? I think I have been much nicer to Mr. Alison than he has been to us."

"Y—es—no—I'm not sure that you have," returned the little lady, thoughtfully. "That evening he spent with us I remember thinking you were as near horrid as it was possible for you to be."

"Don't mind complimenting me if you feel like it."

"I shan't," returned her fault-finder, calmly; "for you can be so thoroughly charming with people if you want to. But that night a perverse spirit made you appear the most shallow and frivolous of girls. No one would have imagined you ever had a serious thought. And he admired you. Yes, I am sure he did. But I know he expected something much more intellectual than

you showed yourself that evening. Why, you were perfectly devoted to the major, and the pair of you talked sheep-breeding and high and low pasture lands until one would think you had been born in a stable, and never had any higher themes of conversation."

"Go on. What a memory you have for reminiscences."

"Don't you really like him, Judith?"

"I would not dare say 'no' even if I thought it," said Mrs. Holmes, banteringly. "Of course I like the man well enough. He is as good as the average specimen, I dare say. And it behooves me to be agreeable, else he may withdraw his lordly favor in the shape of future work."

"Judith!"

"I'm done."

"I will not have you look on my friends in that horrid, mercenary light."

"*Your* friends? Do you remember it was I who introduced you? I knew him first."

"I," triumphantly announced the little lady, with an air of check, "danced him on my knee years and years ago."

"I give in," laughed Mrs. Holmes. "As yet I have not had that felicity."

"Judith!"

"My dear, you will, I am sure, develop into a little gray-garbed exclamation point if you persist in that startling habit you have of quelling the major and myself."

"Do try and be a little nicer to him now that

we have met again," said Mrs. Winans, persuasively; "really it seems like fate."

"It seems a great deal more like following him," returned Mrs. Holmes, in a matter-of-fact way. And then they saw the forms of their scouts coming up the street, and judged from the major's satisfied face that it had been a successful raid.

"I give in, little woman," he said, when in speaking distance; "your nursling is a genius in the way of a guide. You are installed in the prettiest, breeziest of rooms, with a view that is an invigorator in itself; a resting place to gladden the hearts of just such tramps as we. Come along, little captain, I leave my spouse to express her gratitude to Mr. Alison, and we will lead the way in the direction of dinner—it smells excellent."

And a pleasant resting place they really found it; a big white frame house with immense wide porches, and a great, grassy yard reaching down to the street that was really more like a country road, for beyond it was a meadow where the cattle grazed almost to the water's edge. And out from that shimmered the waves in the noon sun, away across to the long bar of yellow sand that breaks in two the distance between the home shore and the lighthouse.

"It is glorious," admitted Mrs. Holmes, stepping out on the porch, where an after-dinner smoke was making the air redolant of Durham, N. C.

"The credit is all Mr. Alison's. Come right here and say something nice to him," commanded Mrs. Winans, who had preceded her, and joined the gentlemen, the youngest of whom gave her his chair, and tossing his cigar away, arranged a corner for Mrs. Holmes, where the view was best. Into it she dropped, indolently, with a gracious nod of thanks.

"I am not at all sure that I know how to say nice things," she remarked, "but if any one will prompt me I will do my best."

"I think an extremely nice thing to say would be that you are not sorry to see me again," ventured Alison.

"How could I possibly be that when we have been such gainers through your kindness? I am really very grateful."

"You may call that nice, but I was not fishing for gratitude," he returned, drily.

"What's that about fishing?" called the major, from the steps, where he was watching a couple of boys tussling on the grass; "good fishing about here?"

"No," said Mrs. Holmes, provokingly, "Mr. Alison finds the water too shallow."

"Not that exactly," he returned, "only wind and tide are rather perverse for smooth sailing."

And then their eyes chanced to meet, and did not seem able to part unconsciously, and both having a rather keen sense of the ridiculous, found themselves laughing in each other's faces, without

any reason that could be easily explained to a third person.

"Did you really run away around the corner of the island, as Mrs. Winans accused you of doing?" she asked, after a little, and the mere question gave him a hope that a part of the barrier was slipping away. Several times in their rather peculiar acquaintance, he had thought that, and then, without the slightest warning, had suddenly found it raised again, and herself buried behind it completely out of sight.

"I did not run away, I sailed away," he returned, literally, "and I came around the corners, as you term it, because it was the only way I could reach Montauk Point, as I am doing some work for which it was—"

"There, there," she protested, "I am not installed as confessor to you; I leave that to Mrs. Winans, who was disconsolate at not being able to renew more thoroughly your former acquaintance."

"One that was all on her side," he returned, "owing to my insensibility, at that age, to the charms of ladies in general."

"One you have outgrown, I dare say," said the old lady, who was promenading the porch, and reached their corner in time to hear the last remark.

"I shall try to prove so during your stay," he answered her, "as under existing circumstances, we are obliged to live under the same roof, unless you decree that I shall take myself boatward."

"You are much more likely to take to a boat of your own accord," she smiled in return; "but if you do remain, I promise to see that we do not in the least interfere with your work. You shall be just as industrious as you like, you, and Judith, too. In fact, she never does, and never will stop her work for any one. She is the most independent of mortals, and never expects the little attentions of life, and I—well, I do a little. But the major is never far off. So you two young people can work through your vacations to your hearts' content."

"That *sounds* very well," remarked the major in an aside to Alison, "and is likely to quell a man's fears of fans, and sun umbrellas, and lunch baskets, and awnings, but I happen to know that, little as she is, she can keep three men busy waiting on her, and two is a mere bagatelle."

"One could not reckon you among the bagatelles, major," said his wife, with a comprehensive glance at his aldermanic proportions.

"Now there's little captain," he continued, heedless of the last remark, "she is a thoroughly good fellow, and always able to look after herself."

"Thanks, major. It has been an affair of 'have to' so often, that I never think of waiting for anyone else to take care of me, and am glad my friends appreciate my lack of dependence on them."

"Yes—yes. You always were like that even when a little chap. You know, Mr. Alison, Mrs.

Holmes and myself have been chums ever since she was in pinafores; I helped teach her to ride and swim, and she does me credit, too."

Alison found himself wondering, with a sort of puzzled humor, at his old ideas of this artist. His written opinions of her character, her soul, as he fancied he had caught glimpses of them; and to hear her claimed in this sort of good-fellowship, even by an old friend, was as much of a surprise as her cynical, half-coquetry at their first meeting. It gave him a puzzling feeling of complexity. Her personality in any phase given him was unsatisfactory, a disappointment. Yet back of all his distaste, her face shone out clearly to him, and in its eyes was a something of feeling that belied all the carelessness of raillery.

"She interests, and she disturbs me," he confided to his pipe an hour or so later. "She is a loss, and a gain. She has taken from me all those exalted ideal fancies I had of her. But she has given me instead a character whose study should be a thing desired by a writer. I wonder if that is not a very cold-blooded way to think of her after—after—well, it is not I, it is herself. I feel ashamed in her eyes when I remember that episode of Oyster Bay, and yet, I am irritated with her for not being what I hoped. It is a decided mix."

After that decision, the pipe having emptied itself into air, he proceeded to disrobe, stopping now and then for a long stare at himself in the mirror, as if it was his own face that puzzled him

instead of another's, and then with a lazy, luxurious stretch between the sheets, he yawned himself sleepily into another query: "I wonder how long she has been a widow, and I wonder—I wonder what Mr. Holmes was? That knowledge might help one to see a little daylight through this confused personality."

CHAPTER VI.

Because its way was as a lost star's way,
A world not wholly known of day or night.
* * * * * *
Song, have thy day and take thy fill of light
Before the night be fallen across thy way.

SWINBURNE.

SAG HARBOR, L. I., JUNE 15, 188—.

MY DEAR GEORGE: Yes, I am still here in this delightfully primitive end of the island, the portion of it where wild bits will persist in stubbornly resisting all things modern or civilized. I find it most enjoyable, and have met people here pleasant to know—two that are delightful old characters, Mr. and Mrs. Winans, and the third is Mrs. Holmes. You will wonder, no doubt, that I have not written of our meeting before. I have known her now three weeks, or I can scarcely say I know her, either. If I had been more sure of that you would have heard of our meeting earlier. We are two different people from the writers of

those letters, and it is rather humiliating to have to confess that I deserve a sort of neglect that I have been treated to in that direction. The cause is not easy to explain; it is through no new shortcoming, but merely because the shadows of the old have such a trick of cleaving to a man. You know the earnest, sympathetic character I had pictured her. Well, what do you imagine the realization to be? A gay, careless, beautiful creature. Those are the first words of description that occur to me. They do not suggest the writer of those letters, do they? To me she is a Mona Lisa, laughing always with her lips, yet compelling thought always with her eyes. Her friends adore her, and despite the contradictory curves in her nature I feel always a sense of its fineness. A certainty that friendship from her would be as a friendship from man to man—without any mistaken ideas for a foundation such as generally exist between men and women. You would have to know her independence of character to understand this idea of her.

I wish you could come down here for a few days. You would like each other I am sure, and against you she would build up no barricade.

I forgot to mention that Mrs. Winans knew my mother, and remembers Julia as a child quite well, and on the strength of those reminiscences has delegated me as escort in ordinary to herself —in fact has adopted me in the most motherly fashion. A dainty, charming, make-believe mother, who is looked after still as a sort of

spoiled child by her big, jolly, good-natured husband.

Come down if you can. I believe the Winans expect friends for a few days' stay, and a young girl who is to be left in their charge for the summer. I know the male portion of the party; Hallet is the name; pleasant sort of fellows. But the quartette here for the past week has been in many ways a pleasant affair, and I do not care to have pleasant affairs banished by new-comers, who swoop down with the assured presumption of prior rights through first acquaintanceship.

This strikes me as being a very different tone of letter from the last one I wrote you regarding my artist friend. I called her friend then with more certainty than I can now. The unexpected seems always happening in our acquaintance, and I find myself wondering if the interest in each other that seemed fraught with earnest good is after all to dwindle into a mere episode, a suggestion of helpful promises empty of fulfillment.

But moralizing is out of tune with the weather to-day. A stiff breeze is blowing, just enough to take us out to deep water, where I think the fish are waiting for us, so a good-bye to you. Write me when you feel in the humor, and come to me if you can. DALE.

A few days after the posting of the above a large row-boat, cutting its way over the home waters of the Sound, had on board a party of visitors, together with the Hallets, whose coming Alison had not regarded with special favor.

There was the father, a slightly built gentleman with eye-glasses and mutton-chop whiskers that, together with a tourist cap, gave him quite an English air—a bit of a dandy despite his gray hairs and his grown children. Two of them—Tom, a young fellow of twenty-two, and Grace, a girl of sixteen—the identical Grace who had helped eat Alison's candies that day at Oyster Bay, and who, despite conventional introductions, persisted in calling him Fra Lippo.

"Why not?" she demanded of Mrs. Holmes, who had smiled questioningly at the title, "Tom says it's too familiar, but I can't see that it is, only to call a man by the name of a monk who died generations ago. I think it gives quite an ecclesiastical tone to an acquaintance, don't you?"

"An ecclesiastical tone seems rather far-fetched, does it not? He was a sad bohemian—I mean, of course, Fra Lippo."

A little back of them sat Alison, and hearing the words, smiled a little, not a very gay smile. Nothing in this new acquaintance seemed to partake of gayety to him, though the bit of suggestion in her speech might have shown him that her interest had been enough to make her remember.

"Papa likes him," continued the girl, "and so does Tom, and I—well, I just think he's a dar—well, splendid," she amended, in view of Mrs. Holmes' raised brows. "Fra Lippo himself could not be more interesting—a novelist, too! and I just dote on literary people."

"My blushes prompt me to tell you I am here," said a voice back of them, "and the wind is blowing your stage whispers straight to me, and, Miss Grace, if you have any more of those pleasant things to say, tell them to me; I will be much more easily convinced of my own charms than you will find Mrs. Holmes. She has an ingrained disbelief in me."

"How can you say that?" asked Mrs. Winans, after they had landed, and scattered over the beach, or wandered into the woods. "I am quite sure Judith thinks well of you, but you see her own experiences have made her a little cynical as to men in general."

The old lady seemed to take it for granted that he knew something about those hinted at experiences, and the mere fact that they had existed made him wonder a little as to their tone, but he only said: "Yes, no doubt," in a non-committal way.

"You see she was very young when the marriage took place," continued the old lady, as if in extenuation of something, "and it seems such a pity that it should have affected her life as it has. She does not seem to forget it easily, but then she never was like most girls."

"No," he said, looking at her where she sat, quiet and alone in the edge of the woods, where the sweet bay grows down to the sea sand, "no, she is not."

"I am so glad you find her exceptional," fluttered the little gray dove in a pleased way, "so

few people know her at her best; in fact, but few people ever know her at all, she is so averse to society in general."

"Yet she seems fitted for a social life," he remarked, feeling that he should say something, but preferring to watch lazily the subject of their conversation.

"Certainly she is," assented her friend warmly, "but her strange education, her queer training, you know, gave her too serious a nature for a girl. At seventeen she was more an atheist than anything else."

"What?" he said, in slow surprise, raising himself on his elbow.

"Yes," she nodded, "I used to think it terrible when I met them first. But her father was the same; she knew nothing else. What a dreamer that man was, but brilliant—yes, decidedly so. And such a clique as he kept about him! queer companions for a girl—earnest scientists, worn-out pretenders, victims of either churches or governments abroad; in fact, the place always seemed redolent of gunpowder plots and martyrdom. His house was open, and toward the last, his pockets generally empty. And all the while Judith growing to womanhood, with little care but that of Lisa, her nurse. Just think of such dubious, shifting surroundings for a girl."

"She does not seem ever to have belonged to such surroundings," he answered.

"Certainly not; but as I said before, she was not like other girls, else she would have been

influenced by it very badly, led into all sorts of wild hobbies. But as it was, she with her nature was only led through it into marriage."

"Was he—was her husband of the same ideas in a religious way?" he asked.

"Winnett Holmes? Well, I should imagine his fancies in religion, were as in all things else —changeable. He was a dilletante in those days, a skimmer of all things serious, but a trifler always; one of the men whom the major says is a good fellow among the boys, but not an angel in the home circle. But Judith, with her earnest way of taking tinsel for gold, did not see the pretenses and the hollowness until it was too late."

"No doubt it is often so in love affairs, is it not?" he asked, rather lamely.

"You ought to know just as much about that as an old woman like me," she returned, half-teasingly; "but the worst of this was that I don't believe there was any love affair about it. He was infatuated with her, and had made love to too many women not to know exactly how to win a great, lonely, serious child, for she was little more when her father died. She had a sort of fancy that life would go on much the same with herself and a husband, as it had been with herself and her father—one of simplicity and study. Well, you will have to hear the major tell his usual order of life to show one how short a time it took to disillusion a girl of her dreamy impractical nature."

"It is best after all then that she has been left alone—so," he said approvingly. As he glanced across at her, where the others had joined her, and she was skimming the water with pebbles, her laugh coming to them clearly as she distanced Tom Hallet in the same feat; and watching the girlishness of her manner, it seemed to him only right that anything in the way of a weight should be removed from her life, if even by death.

"Of course it is best," said Mrs. Winans, decidedly. "It was an unfortunate affair and has changed all her ideas of happiness; now the sum total to her seems to be freedom. Just to have her work, and live her life alone."

"And her religion?" he queried, remembering those letters of hers that seemed to him so full of a helpful spirit of religion, though in reality it may not have been an orthodox one.

"She never discusses that now," answered the old lady, "and I have a hope that among other things he made hateful to her was that sham of pretense. For I think he was really too shallow even to have been an honest atheist."

"An honest atheist," repeated Alison, smiling; "we are not far enough advanced as yet to hear that term in a commonplace way. It sounds anomalitic."

"It would not if you had known her father," she returned warmly. "He was an honest atheist and an exceptional nature, one that he has given in part to Judith. The sort that keeps itself clean even when helping others out of the mud.

But through his associates and her husband one could see how much pretense there is among those dissenters from faith. A desire to be thought of stronger mind than those who let themselves believe. There is as much pretense among atheists as there is in the churches."

"And she has drifted away from them, you think?"

"I scarcely know. She does not speak of herself with her old freedom; we have not seen much of her for two years; since she has been doing book illustrating she has traveled much, just herself and Lisa, and the contact with strangers has given a sort of veneer that she never used to have, an independence, and a pretense of frivolity that is not natural. Look at her now! Just for the moment in that romp with Grace she is herself, but in five minutes she is so likely to act the most *blasé* of mortals. I feel like lecturing her, sometimes, and then again I can only feel sorry."

A little later the old lady's gossiping was ended by Grace, who captured her and insisted that she go over and read a lecture to the major whom she declared was flirting shamefully with her. And Alison lay where she had left him, his eyes following Mrs. Holmes and Tom Hallet as they sauntered along the beach shying pebbles and talking. Now they reach a strip of boggy land, and Tom holds her hand and helps her over, and now he takes her parasol and saunters along with his hand almost touching the white draped shoulder. What decided shoulders she has, he

thought, and at the same time, how insignificant Tom Hallet could look. He had known him for some time, but the idea had never struck him with such force until he saw him bending toward Mrs. Holmes in that impressive manner.

"What idiots some men can look when there is a woman in the question," he thought, morosely, and then laughed as he added, "I wonder which of us Tom would think most like a fool in this case?"

And he rose and stalked over to where the others had, by this time, settled down again, like a covey of quail, a little up from the shore, and under the shade of pine boughs whose aroma was so pungent, so insinuating, when touched by the sea air. There had been a slight fall of rain the night before, just enough to open the lips of leaves and blossoms for the drink they crave through the summer months, even though the wealth of the sea waves creep so close about their feet. Ah! that inborn longing of all things in Nature! that raises faces, hopes, longings, ever upward. That would place wishes among the stars, and essay climbing through space, and failing, would draw the thing wished for down to lower levels! The same principle governs souls and the leaves that spring sunward.

And the idle group drew in long breaths of the salt air and the balsam, and chatted indolently to the accompaniment of low, rippling waves, and whispering branches.

"A little like that old place of Holmes' at

Elizabeth City," remarked Mr. Hallet as Alison sauntered toward them. "Just the same sort of water-view from that old lawn; only there, one had the cypress and Spanish moss instead of these northern trees, a crazy old building that was. Has he managed to keep it?"

"Yes," answered the major, as he turned puffing, and red in the face from pushing Grace and the boat out where the water was deep enough for her to paddle around, and try to row. "Yes, he had decency enough to settle that on her; though, so far, she has had too much pride to live in it. But it is only right that he provide her with a home at least. I think Claude Latante would come back from his grave to set things right if he could know what that daughter of his has had to live through, simply because of her early surroundings, that blinded her to what a woman's life should be."

"I think she has set things as near right for herself as they can be set now," said Mrs. Winans, "only it has all changed her so terribly."

"Naturally," assented Mr. Hallet, "I never knew her or her family. But what a charming scamp he was a few years ago—ten or fifteen—with his half Byronic face, and his impressive manner that was a flattery to every woman he whispered to or smiled at. I saw him in Montreal last summer with a rather dissipated set, and a different tone to his manner. He is going down hill, but he is interesting to the last."

"Yes, Holmes had a nice way with him, a confoundedly nice way," said the major, slowly. "And, in some respects, was mighty taking."

"He must have been," remarked Mrs. Winans, "when he took to abusing his wife."

"Clara!" admonished her husband, "that is not a comfortable thing to speak of, and, beside, it is something one can only have the word of servants for—she, herself, would never speak."

"I acknowledge the bad taste of it," asserted his wife, "but Mr. Hallet knows his story pretty well, and as to Mr. Alison — I forgot for the moment; but—"

"Please feel no uneasiness on my account," said Alison, hastily, "since I do not know the man you speak of."

He noticed that the name was Holmes, and thought it probably some relative of the woman walking away down along the beach with Tom Hallet. Why is it that any two people, even though they be the most uncongenial, if they happen to walk alone together along a sandy shore, or a shady road, always have the appearance of lovers to an onlooker?

"And to-day's laziness and picnic flavor," resumed Mr. Hallet, "some way reminded me of the lawn at Holmes Grove. I haven't been there since the war; then I went down from Fort Hampton with a party of officers and put in a great time in the old house—a fine old place. His father was living then, so he had not had a chance to get at the property."

"When he did, he made it fly," said the major, and then turning to Alison: "Have you ever been down through tide-water Virginia or the Carolinas?" he asked. "Lots of material there for romance writers, I should say."

"Not yet; it is a trip I have been promising myself. You advise the coast line?"

"Yes, if you cut across the swamps and get out of the beaten paths. The region around that old town we were speaking of is full of quaintness, and some of the homes are pictures—the one at Holmes Grove in particular, with its pink stuccoed walls covered with ivy, and shaded by live oaks, and you could quarter a regiment in its immense rooms."

"And its owner is an acquaintance of yours?"

"Why, yes. It is Winnett Holmes."

Alison had a queer feeling as he heard the reply, a something like a slight shock, as he thought: "Where was it I heard that name lately? Somewhere—where?"

And then, still uncertain, he asked:

"A relative of this Mrs. Holmes?" and it seemed an age before some one said:

"Well, yes. A relative by marriage. He is her husband."

He did not know who said it, and some way he dropped out of the conversation, and they talked on, while he lay there looking lazy and half sleepy. All their former words that were as Choctaw before had now a meaning to him—and such a meaning! "He is her husband."

Then he lived! She was a man's wife! How he had drifted into his ideas of her widowhood he could not tell. But, after seeing her, he had never once been able to associate any man's personality with hers. Even when assured of it he could not bring his imagination to think of her as belonging to anyone. So many fogs were cleared from his vision of her by those words that hummed through his ears for many a day: "He is her husband." He could understand now the serious, half-starved soul that turned to an unknown personality for the sympathy that had failed her in the lives brought close to her own. He could understand the sensitiveness that shrank from meeting him on the footing established through their letters. The fear that any should know her story and know also that the indifference she feigned at times was only a cover for a lonely nature. One so unconfessing of its wants that only to a piece of paper would it express itself—a piece of paper that was as a journal that responded, that returned her an answer from one who saw only her mind—not her face, and whose human eyes she had thought never to meet. Ah, yes! He could understand it all now, with a great wave of something akin to tenderness in his thoughts of her. Not so much to her—the woman—as to a being that had suffered; that had turned to him; and that, in a degree that might be small, was yet, through sympathy, to him a possession. And then his thoughts crept nearer, to their first meeting. And knowing something

of the life she had lived, he could see how she had been affected by that scene at the old mill. He had helped that day to shatter her faith in human nature just as that other man had shown her the lives men live.

Yes, it all seemed so plain to him by this new light, so pitifully plain to his remorseful eyes! But, in his heart, there surged a determination to make it all up to her—to prove somehow that her belief was not utterly without cause. "If I can only try to be worthy," was the one thought uppermost, as he lay there on the sands. And in his desire to be worthy, he scarcely questioned the cause that prompted it.

Had he done so, he would have found it centered in an emotion, not in a reason.

What reason had he for gladness over what he had heard? What reason that the waves sang calmly in rippling promises for the future where, before, they had only murmured softly of depths in the past? Who can answer for the tides that govern emotion?

Sometimes the hand of God touches a chord in the human heart through which the music of nature thrills. At times we call it Religion, Love, or Genius, according to the moods that govern it. It is the touch of the spirit that has led men to sacrifice, either to die or to live for the good of others. Call it what we may, yet the cause of all has a touch of divinity.

He was but a man, with the passions of earth, and the commonplaces of life usually to fill his

hours, yet something of that higher spirit forged a bond between himself and that woman that day—only the waves, and the winds, and himself knew it. But a great gladness came with the knowledge that now he understood, and a great determination to be worthy to give her needed friendship. No one else knew as he did—he felt so sure of that. Poor tired heart that she was! And she had turned to him once with the hope of easing her own load through giving help to others! Never again should she find him lacking. Never again should he add any hurt to the life whose hurts had been so deep.

And that resolve lightened the sky for him that day, and softened all tones of feeling, until finally he arose and sauntered down along the sands alone. The closeness of even the most pleasant of friends jarred on this new feeling that had come to him.

His ideas were not connected enough to be called thought—they were merely impressions. And the sea and the sands were the best companions—they absorb all, even bits of broken, half formed speech. And they tell no secrets of the living, only of the dead—sometimes.

Down around a bend he saw Mrs. Holmes and Hallet returning; with a new feeling he walked toward them. Hallet had a kerchief about his neck, and another in his hand that he was brandishing wildly. "Mosquitoes," he said, tersely; "they have followed us from that swamp back there, the little fiends!"

"And you?" Alison asked, turning to her.

"Oh, they keep away from Mrs. Holmes as if she were poison," complained Hallet, in an aggrieved way, at which the other two laughed. But it was a serious affair to poor Tom, all the more so from knowing he looked ridiculous.

"You are tired," said Alison, with an instinctive air of solicitude in his manner. She looked up quickly, noting the new tone.

"Not much, only the wind has made me a little drowsy, I think."

"And when do you ever intend to rest?" It was not so much the words as it was the strange, new tone that again raised her eyes to his in a half-questioning way. But she made no reply, only stooped and sent a pebble skimming low over the water.

"But you can not fling your weariness away so," he remarked, with that same persistence she had at first noted in him, and coquetted with. "You must leave that tired look here by the sea, and absorb instead the rest that your work will need."

"What makes you lay such stress on my well-being all at once?" she asked, directly.

"Why? Well, because I feel that your friends should lay stress on it."

She did not answer; did not even raise her eyes this time. Something in this new manner of his checked the careless, cynical words she would have uttered an hour before. Some assertive spirit, some vague strength had been given him

that felt itself in the right and would not be combated. Scarcely knowing why she did so, she found herself influenced by that unexpressed force, and she walked in silence beside him back to the others.

She heard him tacitly class himself among her friends without any rebellion of her will that had seemed on the defensive against him for so many days past. Was she so tired with work and thought that she had no will left to surprise, or was she only careless.

He did not know, and he felt stubbornly that he did not care, so far as it affected himself—that she should never drive him out of her ken again.

Hallet, still fighting mosquitoes, had surrendered the sun umbrella to Alison, and stalked along ahead of them as a sort of courier, his white kerchief still waving.

"Who are you flirting with so outrageously?" called Grace. "Mosquitoes? Tell that to some other fellow's sister! Mrs. Holmes, I'm surprised that you allow him to be so very giddy. No use making excuses. Just look through this glass toward that old pier and be ashamed of yourself."

Tom growlingly took the glass and growlingly handed it back. Sure enough, a party of girls, armed with fishing tackle, were waving white handkerchiefs frantically in the direction of the group on the sands. They had mistaken Tom's pantomime and thought the waving of his hands a signal to themselves.

Amid the general laughter and the teasing of Grace they reëmbarked, and moved their boat slowly through the waters that had grown still in the light of the sun that was far aslant. Around a great bend they half drifted, first one and then another touching the oars lazily, while across the water from the fisher-girls came strains of "Good-bye, my Lover, Good-bye."

The older people, even the major, had talked themselves a little tired, and enjoyed the quiet that had fallen over the water. Tom's eyes, despite mosquito bites, did persist in turning back to those forms on the old pier—masculine human nature, and twenty-two years of age!

Grace, inspired no doubt by those other voices, began humming bits of song in an undertone, and then, emboldened a little by the silence that suggested attention, she gave a wider range to the indistinct bits, and in a voice really fine, and possessed of more expression than is generally given to youth, she sang "Twickenham Ferry," and passed from its brightness and jingle to quieter airs attuned to the silvery tones of the evening.

Mrs. Holmes, in the bow, looked a little like the figure-head of a craft, her face straight ahead —only the warm curve of neck and cheek seen by the others. But even the soft outlining of drapery about the unconscious form had a new beauty to Alison as he watched her. He could not imagine her being anything but graceful—with the grace that does not depend on pose, but

is innate in some bodies as expression is in some eyes.

"You sing beautifully," she said, turning to the girl. "Mr. Hallet, you should not neglect the cultivation of a voice like that."

"I am afraid to humor her in it," he replied, "lest the music turn a master in our family, and I have a tyrannical fondness for being master myself."

"I think that he is afraid I will be an opera-singer," answered Grace; "that's what's the matter with papa; and I will if I can get any influence from my friends to help me; some one of whom he has the very highest opinion. If Mrs. Holmes would only put in an oar—I mean a word, now and then, and be just a little nice to him, even flirt with him in moderation, you might help me to win the prize, for he is perfectly devoted to you."

"Just give me a chance to say that part of it for myself," suggested her father.

"I would," continued the incorrigible, "but papa's timidity is his strong point—oh, yes it is," she insisted, in return to the laughter of the others; "mamma told me she had to do half the courting; she was like me, you know, and didn't mind it."

"No," put in her brother; "I doubt if you would mind it."

"But Fra Lippo knows that I can be very correct," she said, turning to him for proof. "He knows I can chaperon myself famously, and the

other girls as well, and he has seen me under—well, circumstances."

"And opposite a mirror," he added.

"Yes," she said, with a sudden flash of memory and roguishness, "and I remember where somebody's eyes wandered to in that mirror—but I won't tell," she added, quickly, as his hand was raised ever so slightly.

"Oh, yes, you will," remarked Tom, "girls always tell; so you had better speak out and get it off your conscience. And if it was Alison's eyes, I wish you would use your knowledge and unmask him to Mrs. Winans. I used to be a thing of beauty, and altogether lovely in her eyes, until she fished him out of the sea down here, and I have been sent to the shades ever since."

Tom was a big, manly-looking fellow, but his straight red hair, and his freckles, that would reach a degree of prominence startling to behold, rather debarred him from being classed among things of beauty. And in the impression caused by his ludicrous complaint, the subject of it was forgotten, unless by Grace, who was retrospective.

"Don't you think it all very strange," she continued, "our meeting there at Oyster Bay, and none of us knowing each other, and then meeting here and being such chums? Why, the girls and I wondered for days who Mrs. Holmes was; and when the Major and Mrs. Winans came, and we found she was an old friend of theirs, oh, how delighted I was," she said, giving the figure-head in the boat a little squeeze on the arm. "And

then there was Fra Lippo, who looked down on us for just two days, and then left us in a halo of delicious doubt, and a sort of Captain Kidd atmosphere."

"Are you not getting a little mixed?" suggested Tom. "Fra Lippo, Captain Kidd, and Mr. Alison, you should sue her for defamation of character."

"No, I am not mixed. Captain Kidd really did belong to this island once, and would appear and disappear in the most delightfully mysterious way, and leave treasure buried in the coves."

"But Mr. Alison leaves no buried treasure on our shores does he?" queried Mrs. Holmes, without turning her head.

"No," he answered, as carelessly; "I have come to find it."

"And you find us," supplemented Grace—"there is a compliment for us, if we want to twist our imagination to fit it."

"And yours is equal to the emergency," laughed her father; "you should try to utilize it in romance writing."

"I will when Fra Lippo wants a literary partner," said Grace, audaciously. "But until then, I will have to conjure up romances, or sing only for my own amusement."

"And for our pleasure," said Mrs. Holmes, kindly.

"You *are* a good soul," said Grace, appreciatively; "you always put one in good humor with one's self, and I shall pay you in the best coin I've got."

"And make her sorry she spoke," added Tom with brotherly candor, and a last glance at the nymphs on the old pier as their boat veered around a point, and gave them new scenes, new lights and shadows in the water. But Grace unheeding the irony of the speech gave to Mrs. Holmes her promised pay in song.

In the semi-circle of the harbor, lay the little town ahead of them, backed by its rolling hills over which the sun shot lances of light that sparkled flame-like on western windows.

Away out the light-house shone white in its setting of shimmering opal, and around them silver and rose seemed to bathe in the ever tremulous surface of the bay, all change, all glitter and glimmer; but all peace was the impression given by that minor key of color on which the girl's voice fell in unison, echoing the wistfulness of "Some Day" with a pathos that left at least one person in the boat touched by the meaning in it.

"Our hearts—our hands shall meet—some day."

With the plaintiveness of that half-hope, and the music of it there was ever after to Alison's ears coupled the soft dip of caressing oars—the fresh atmosphere of the sea—and the face of a woman drooping low over the bow of the boat; was it only to watch her own broken image in the waves? or was it with the weight of certainty that her life was lived—was put beyond the pale of longing hands, or the endearing of any heart that would bring with it content.

The boat grated on the sand, and as Alison stopped to put up the meadow bars, Mrs. Holmes spoke to him in a slightly constrained way:

"I thank you for that implied friendship," she said. "After all, one can not afford to ignore friendly intents; life holds too few of them. That sounds selfish, though I do not feel so. I think the evening and Gracie's music has left an atmosphere that breathes of peace and good-will toward our neighbors; it is resistless."

And thus the evening fell, and two natures, someway, without a visible cause, left a barrier buried in the sands, or washed in the waves of the far shore.

CHAPTER VII.

Am I not like to thee?
The like may sway the like.
E. B. Browning.

"Yes, if I had known you personally instead of knowing you by letter we would never have known each other so well," she said, a few days later, when they had got a little used to this more even tenor of acquaintanceship.

"That is rather an anomalous statement, is it not? It makes one curious as to the reason."

"I am not sure there is a reason, unless it is that — have you ever read Daudet's article on Rochefort?"

"Unless it is that—have I ever read Daudet?"

he repeated. "That sounds like an attempt at Dutch dialect."

And then they laughed, happy people—as sympathetic people laugh at such little things; just as it is the little waves that catch the arrows of the sun's flame and give back to us far-reaching vistas of glory.

"I mean that I may explain by an illustration of his. Rochefort writing under his own name was constrained and conventional; but for a lark he wrote some articles under the name of a friend, when it was discovered that once left unbound by the sense of his own personality he was enabled to write matter with so much daring and originality, that at once, from an unknown journalist, he became a personage."

"And you think personal knowledge would have fettered the thoughts you expressed to me through ink and paper?"

"Certainly. I could not have looked squarely in your face and been so presumptuous as to find fault with or criticise your work, so I took the mean advantage of doing it and keeping myself hidden. You see, sometimes one's imagination needs food for expression, and in a moment of that mental desperation, I seized on your poor book, dissected it, and advocated a higher standard of work, even though the ones you had were higher than I could have kept up to myself."

"I think not," he said decidedly, "your ideals are higher than mine; I know it because those

letters of yours brought back to me the purer ones of a half-forgotten boyhood, the sort of ideals that grow rather dim and rusty in our later days—so far away that our eyes can barely see their forms."

"So long as one can see them at all there is hope," she answered slowly. "It is only when they are dashed down in ruins about one's feet that hope dies out and despair takes its place, and nothing supersedes that."

"If I said so you would tell me that resignation could help to do so, and in its wake would come peace," he said, drifting into her own manner of speech. They were silent for a little while looking out over the meadows and the bay. She said nothing, and he, watching her, wished that just for once he could see a light in her eyes that was not transitory, a content that was not fleeting.

"You have known those broken ideals so well?" he said at last. "You are young to speak with that conviction as of experience."

"I have had much that the world would call experience," she answered in that same low, slow way, "if by the word you mean enduring through many phases of life and thought—ah, the thoughts! Do you know, I think it is the thoughts and their effects that are hardest to live through; harder even than the realities are the scourges of the imagination."

"To the imaginative, yes," he said, his eyes turning away from her face that had grown pained

as if from memories. "Do you know," he went on, "I think you have lived too much alone, too much in yourself. You have given only the careless side of your nature to your social friends."

She smiled again at that. "I give them only what they want," she answered. "In society people are acquaintances, seldom friends—I found it so, but it depends much on oneself, I suppose. If one has nothing to give in exchange one can expect nothing, and when society and I were on bowing terms those broken ideals had fallen into a chaos about me, and over them I could not see very clearly, and so—well, I found an old house in North Carolina, and an old servant who loved me—a good exchange I have never regretted."

Her eyes wide-earnest turned to him as she spoke. How clear they were! How easily associated with all ideas of purity! He thought in a disjointed way of white violets with the dew still on them, of summer seas in the virginity of dawn. He could imagine her as stepping with untainted garments from out that moral wreck that had so nearly encompassed her. He could see her so clearly back in that old home trying to gather up the broken threads of girlish life over again, and through all the heart aches, yet the wistful determination of sufficiency unto herself —an unspoken vow of isolation that no sympathy had been strong enough to break.

Comparisons are odious often, but something akin to them came uncalled to him as he watched

her. He had known so many of the loves of life, and this was only a friendship; yet back into the past the rest crowded as into a night. And of himself, some words of the book his mother had trusted in came to him; some words of "a light that shineth in a dark place until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts."

Scarcely even gathering his impressions into collected thought, he yet felt dimly that the darkness had been long, and that the day star that rose sweetest and clearest in the hearts of men was friendship.

Her beauty had not appealed to him as it had done at first when she had seemed alternately a Francesca and a Mona Lisa. The story he had heard that day on the beach had given such a different tinge to his interest in her.

He could scarcely tell the color of her eyes, though he saw always the sadness in them that the laughing mouth tried so often to contradict. He found himself wishing that Blanche knew her, at least he told himself that he wished it. And then again he could not think of any other personality taken into that half compact of theirs without jarring on the tone of it.

Into the old burial ground of the village they strolled on their first walk alone.

"I can seldom pass one, especially an old one, without going in," she said, in extenuation of her wandering feet. "You see, at my old home many of the tombs are very old and very picturesque. All the people who cared most for me are under

the myrtles there, and the myrtle means rest to me north or south."

"The myrtles mean love, do they not?" he asked. "I think they are given that meaning by the poets."

"The poets are wiser than we plodders," she returned; "they know that love and death go hand in hand, so they give the significance of the affections to the vine of the graves."

"That seems wrong," he contested; "love should have some symbol of life, of unchangeable existence."

"You think so," she smiled; "that is the desire of us grasping human beings. But the Fates know better."

"The Fates, you believe in them?"

"In the Fates, or the gods, or whatever rules; they know that if love was made unchangeable on earth, undying, that paradise would have no allurements left for humanity."

"It means so much to you?" he asked abruptly, surprised at her decided statement, and feeling in a queer sort of way that love must be known to be analyzed from that point of view, and it gave a bit of sharpness to his tone as he said, "it means so much to you?"

"I think it means God," she answered, "and that only glimpses are given to souls here. Then death, or change, comes. But after a soul has known the fullness of love on earth, God must always after that be nearer; the promises of Heaven must mean as much more, because the

eyes have seen, and the heart has in part proved the prophecies."

"And they could ever imagine her an atheist?" he thought, with a little impatience, "but after all they can not know her as I do."

But close on that conviction, with its vague, sweet tinge of possession, there came a somber wonder if some one some time had taught her that meaning of God, if, after all, it was that change that had left her eyes sad. There seemed to be nothing more to be said. Her words had ended that subject, but to him, at least, the words were suggestive of much thought, and in silence he stooped to gather some of the azure starred blossoms that had led him to revelations.

"So here I have found you," said the chirpy voice of Mrs. Winans behind them; "we saw you through the gateway. What a place to bring up in! and upon my word, gathering myrtles with Mrs. Holmes."

"No, I gather them alone, and I give them to you," he returned, and the old lady wore them in pleased appreciation of the attention Alison never failed to give her, and, wearing them, never guessed how the blood had quickened in the fingers that plucked them, or how strange his voice sounded in his own ears as he answered her, in tones from which the earnestness was dropped with a sense of loss.

"It is like falling back to earth," was the thought that came to him as he hailed the major, made a whip of willow branches for

Grace, and walked back to the house with Mrs. Winans.

Even to himself he did not think to say from where.

But that evening when some of them were planning an excursion for the next day, he said to her:

"We must try to find some place with life and light in it. Our first walk alone was to a graveyard, if one was superstitious they would no doubt think that an evil augury."

"I am superstitious," she replied, "but I am not oppressed with evil forebodings because of that."

"You! Judith?" said Mrs. Winans, in astonishment. "I never imagined you superstitious."

"Perhaps because we have never happened to speak of the subject," returned Mrs. Holmes, quietly; "but I can imagine no religion in the mind of one who has no superstition!"

"Why, Judith! what a singular view to take," said Mrs Winans, a little weakly; while Alison stood looking straight out at the few lights glittering on the night waters, but his ears always open to the sound of her voice.

"I do not think it so curious, it seems only natural, at least to me it is," she replied; "the two can not be separated; each is a belief in the supernatural—in the power of things unseen by human eyes."

"But hang it, little captain!" burst out the major, "ideas of that sort smack so strongly of the table-tipping order of things whose devotees

have to hunt around so often for bail in the district courts. Don't muddle your brain with that sort of thing."

"I don't believe I am very much muddled, and as to the spiritualists' religion, I have never been in one of their churches or places of meeting in my life, yet if they believe in the Christ, as I understand they do, what matter if He is termed by them a medium, or the Son of God? It does not alter the fact of the message which Christians believe He brought from His Father, and without superstition we never would have believed that message."

"But Judith," remonstrated Mrs. Winans; "it is not superstition that gives belief in the Bible and the coming of the Son, it is Christian faith."

"But that is no more proof, it is no more tangible than the thing you call superstition," returned the younger woman. "And somewhere in the book of Hebrews there is a definition of that word faith. It says: 'Faith is the substance of things hoped for—the evidence of things not seen.' Now, what else is superstition, except that it believes it sees?"

"I really can not argue on that or any other question," confessed Mrs. Winans. "I always remember next day the things I might have said on my side. But superstition has always seemed so weak to me."

"Yet many people who are not weak have believed in the supernatural. You see," she

said, turning half laughing to Alison, "I have quite a line of ancestors who have lived and listened to the Banshees in the bogs of Ireland, to say nothing of seeing the 'wee folks who dance in the moonlight o' nights and put spells on the yield of the best milch cow' for a prank, sometimes. Oh, yes, it would be fine times that be come to the world if one didn't stand by their forefathers."

"Nonsense!" laughed the major, at the touch of brogue given her words. "Your father was of English and French parentage."

"Yes, poor papa! I think it was the mixture of antagonistic blood in him that always kept him harrassed so, either for himself or other people. His French impulse was always kicking over the traces of his English caution and getting him into discredit with himself."

"But that gives you no Irish blood," said the major.

"And do you think I only had one parent?" she retorted. "Where would I get the name of Judith, if not from an Irish mother?"

"Yes, it is the one thing about you that does not seem quite right," said Grace, snuggling up to her in what the major termed an insinuating sort of way. "Judith Latante? Yes, that sounds well enough, but the first Judith was a sort of blood and thunder executioner—a melodramatic character. Now, you are not a bit like that."

"But you see they did not know what I might be capable of when I was born," smiled Judith;

"and you do not know yet, because I have not died."

"Judith was not melodramatic," remarked Alison; "the book is a tragic poem."

"That sounds nicer than my idea," assented Grace. "Yes, I could fancy you either tragic or poetical. I remember when I first saw you; I thought you looked like Lucille."

Alison wondered if she impressed every one with that likeness to ideal characters — all so widely different—yet all linked to herself with the subtle bonds of beauty or spirituality, by that something that makes us see the thoughts of poets of the past, materialized and looking at us clearly through the eyes of some present.

"I think you could live Judith's life," he said to her as Grace sauntered down with the major for some cigars in the village, and Mrs. Winans was chatting inside the parlor with the landlady.

"You think so? But Judith was a model of piety. I am not pious."

"No, but you are religious. You show that in all you do and say, in all your influence on others. Please do not smile. I mean what I say. I know why you doubt, but some time, if you would but listen, I could feel like speaking to you of that."

"It does not matter, why should you?"

Neither seemed to think then how that remark of hers granted an understanding of what his thoughts were, that first subtle touch of a spirit, all ages have been shaped by.

"Because I know that, in several ways, I am in

a false light to you. All of us are bad enough. But I would like you to know that — well, many things. I—have you been told that I am to be married before very long?"

"No," she said. Only that—no comment, no question, and drew a white shawl from about her waist up about her throat.

He did not know whether that monosyllable meant unconcern, or whether her own bonds had made even the subject distasteful.

"I thought perhaps Mr. Hallet had mentioned it to you. He knows the lady. I thought I wanted you to know."

"Yes."

It was a kind assent, a sort of permission to go on. But it was not the sort of response needed to make a man very communicative; it was a gracious tolerance.

She was sitting with one arm around the post of the verandah. Her face leaning against the white wood was outlined in profile perfectly clear in the starlight. So close, his outstretched hand could have touched knee or shoulder. Yet all at once she seemed as far removed from him in spirit as the light-house down the bay, where her eyes were looking.

"Because your influence, your letters made me think of those bonds more seriously than either she or I had thought of them before," he continued; "and I wanted you to know that if earnest happiness ever comes to us, it will have been through your good help to me."

"To you and your—wife?" She changed neither her glance nor her tone, her face as expressionless as if she had not heard.

"Yes," to both. "Because you gave me the desire to be worthy of a wife's regard, and that is, I think, one of the first steps toward happiness for two people; do you not think so? It means beginning life over again, with a laudable object to work for."

She did not reply to that query; women are curious compounds. It is said of them that they never care to hear a love story, unless it is of a love for themselves. Her silence brought that idea flitting across his mind. But it was such an incongruity when applied to her, that he dismissed it with a half impatience toward himself. It would not have appeared such an improbable thought of any other woman. But of her!

He wondered if she was going to say anything, or whether she was too little interested for comment. Directly, however, she spoke, and both the words and her tone had a curious ring.

"Then you have discussed me, discussed my letters and thoughts with—your wife?"

"Yourself, yes; the subjects of our letters, no. Their effects are all she has seen. But why do you say 'wife' in that manner? She is not my wife until we are married."

"No!" and she smiled a little—not a very mirthful smile. "Does the bond of marriage depend, then, on ceremony alone?"

The question gave him a little shock—a queer

feeling as if some one was sitting in judgment on his emotions that should be holy, and that had been only amusing—that had vibrating through it ever the empty tinkle of cymbals, not the music of nature attuned by the touch of divinity.

Why was it that so often she had the faculty of showing him with a word, a glance, some lack in himself that had never made itself so plain through his own visage? Too subtle for analysis were the impressions borne to him by that tone. He knew only that they sent the blood with a little shiver to his heart at a wild, half-formed thought of what marriage might mean to a man, a marriage such as her words suggested. For a moment he closed his eyes at the mere idea; but back of the shut lids there was photographed a clearly-marked profile of a serious face—a face with eyes as pure as the stars—eyes that looked at him from so great a height—and just then it seemed as if the light in their depths must shine always through his life.

All those mad fancies chased through his brain —all witcheries unbound by the closeness of the cool face with its full red lips against which her finger rested ever so slightly. All at once he felt a blunt inclination to say: "Why are you at times so beautiful to me? or, being beautiful, why do you stand so alone from other women, and on a pedestal a man's arms dare not touch? Be a little more human; faulty enough to understand imperfections in others."

But fast as those unspeakable thoughts flitted

through his brain, yet the silence between them appeared endless, at least to him, and when he spoke none would imagine that his unuttered thoughts were: "Give me your hands; lean toward me! For once let me look at you from the pillow of your breast!"

But he said instead: "Marriage should mean more than the mere ceremony your tone decries. But to look on oneself as a part in the ideal marriage, one must first feel himself worthy—he must feel purified from the reekings of the world. I am sadly lacking in that excellence."

"Does she think so?" The question was evidently one of impulse, for in an instant she added: "Pardon me! do not answer that. It was a thoughtless question; it is nothing to me."

"But I would rather think it is something to you," he said, quietly; "that is if you do not object. If you could only make up your mind to give me even a little of the notice personally that you used to give to my work."

"I give it to your work still," she said, in a kind tone. "But I think I felt from your letters that you were more alone, that you needed help and interest more than I find you do."

"I do need them," he said, rising, and walking to the far end of the verandah. A moment he stood there, and then came back, stopping and looking down at her. She had not moved; what a faculty she had of making a statue of herself in more ways than one!

"I think," he continued, "that I shall always

need them, and to-night I have a wish that you were either my sister or my brother. Can you understand that?"

"Yes, I can;" and for the first time she looked up at him frankly.

"If you were, do you know what I would want to do to-night?" he asked, "to go with you somewhere from the world, to let the wind-sprites skim our boat out of the ken of the commonplace, and into the realms where I have an idea you belong; on a higher plane than I can climb to. But failing in which I have sometimes a strong desire, an unworthy desire to lift you down from. Can you understand that, also?"

How much one can live in an instant! Ages seemed to revolve past him as he stood there gazing into those serious, startled eyes, and realized that his impulse had got the better of him and he had said the truth to her; but one of the truths that should be denied, not confessed. Someway he felt always that he had been forced into it; something in her presence always impelled him to truths whether they counted for or against him; and the depth of feeling in his tones expressed as much as the words themselves.

After a little it was she who broke the silence; there was no pretense of not knowing.

"Yes, I can understand it," she said slowly, "and you are right when you say it is unworthy of you, of myself. What have I done, or been, that you feel like speaking to me so?"

The inquiry was made without embarrassment;

evidently she said truly when she had claimed wealth of experience in life. It had taught her in most things to be mistress of herself. And yet at that last question he almost felt that there were tears in her voice. It made him feel like a brute. Why did she not get angry and cut him as he deserved? he asked himself, savagely.

"You have done or been nothing that has not been right in my eyes," he said; "be sure always of that."

"Then why—"

"I am not sure I can tell you, or that any one would understand," he answered rapidly, half-recklessly. "But you have all my respect, all my regard, even while you make me forget all things conventional. With you I have such a strong desire to be only a man, to think of you as only a woman, to set the world beyond us, to speak to you thoughts as one would tell them to one's own conscience, all the best and the worst, told with all truth."

"And the object?"

How cool she was! he thought; would a volcano ever change that self-possession? Yet he knew she did feel, he knew she was touched by all earnestness, and that knowledge helped him.

"The object I think is a little like that which sends penitents to priests."

She raised her hand ever so slightly at that.

"Don't!" she said uncertainly; "you scarcely know me. I am far from the thoughts of priesthood."

"Perhaps, but you compel thoughts such as the priests strive for. You bring me closer to nature that reasons from the heart and feelings, not from the intellect. You may resent my speaking like this to you to-night. If you judge from the social standpoint, I am presuming to you and not worth the trust of the girl I told you about. But gauging myself from the origin of this half-confession, I know different. You help me to be more worthy the trust when you compel these truths."

She made no comment, and after a little he added: "You are offended, you think me all unworthy?"

"I do not know," she said at last, "I am a slow thinker, I am trying to follow those seemingly incompatible statements of yours. No, I can not think you all unworthy; if you were, you would be less honest. I am willing to believe that those unworthy thoughts of yours are strays of impulse; they do not belong to you—I mean to the best that is in you."

"You are better to me than I deserve," he said.

"Then, if you want me to judge by the heart, instead of the world's standard, you must try to deserve the best. That would be the highest compliment friendship can hope for."

Just then Grace and the major returned, arm in arm, from the village.

"It is a lovely evening for a walk," she called, as she came up across the sward; "you should

not stick so lazily to that porch," and then she ran up the steps and went over to Mrs. Holmes.

"How still you two are?" she said, looking from one to the other, "as if you had not stirred or spoken since we left. Do be more companionable," and then she slipped her arm around the shoulder in the white shawl. "Do you know, Fra Lippo, I think you should write a story about this lovely old place and have Queen Judith here illustrate it. The surroundings are enough to inspire even me. The walk from the village in this starlight is a continuous lover's lane—just the place for romances. I felt tempted to make love to the major, but he wouldn't let me; told me to go ahead through the stile and tell him if that was the one where the step went down. Just think of that for gallantry! A place sure, you know, to be marked with kisses of a summer's evening. I was wondering how many love stories that stile had counted, and major told me not to be silly."

"Good reason to," growled the major, who had just reached the head of the steps. "A girl expecting one to calculate imaginary kisses over a turn-stile — especially other fellows' kisses. Have a cigar, Alison?"

"Now, if the real Fra Lippo was here he could have counted quite a number of his own, could he not, Mr. Alison? In that respect you're ever so much behind your namesake; oh yes you are, you sober sides! Still, papa did tell me something interesting about you this morning before he left,

and I am so glad. It's so romantic even to know one's friends are in love, even if one is not oneself, and Tom says I'm too young. Is it a secret? If so, I won't tell, but I know her. Didn't she ever speak to you of me? Is it a secret?"

"I think not, here," remarked Alison, "if it were you would divulge it in the very act of promising to keep it. It is no secret from Mrs. Holmes, if that is what you mean."

"Isn't that lovely?" asked the girl, giving Mrs. Holmes a little, appreciative hug. "A real love story to interest ourselves in. That is better than the vague, supposititious romances of a turnstile."

And then Mrs. Winans called her, and she lugged the major in to be interviewed by his little superior officer for their long absence.

The other two, halting just an instant, followed. But in that pause he said to her:

"You are better to my erratic moods than I deserve. No one could be like you."

And she answered: "I hope no one ever will be. Curb those erratic strays of impulse for her sake and your own. No other person's opinion should enter into your lives."

CHAPTER VIII.

> And hold the torch out while the winds are rough
> Between our faces to cast light on each?
> I drop it at thy feet, I can not teach
> My hand to hold my spirit so far off.
>
> E. B. BROWNING.

Whatever thoughts the night had held for her, she met him in the morning with more lightness of manner than they had known the evening before.

With a pair of oars over her shoulder, and a sketch-book in her hand, she met him at the porch steps in the late morning.

"I am waiting for Grace," she explained; "we are going to that wooded point out across the water there. I have learned its Indian name, Mushammack."

"I was talking yesterday to some half-breed Indians who live back here in the country," he remarked. "You may find some interesting types among them for sketches. If you care to go I will take you some day."

Grace returned in time to hear the proffer.

"I wonder if for that promise for the future he expects an invitation to go with us to-day?" she queried, in an audible aside.

Mrs. Holmes dropped her head and looked at the girl quizzically from under her brows.

"I wonder?" she echoed, while Alison stood half-laughing, awaiting the verdict.

"Yes, let us take him," suggested Grace. "He won't be in your way, you can sketch just the same, and it is so much nicer to have a cavalier. I think so, though you are too independent to need one. But 'Arnon' may prove too much for me to read. I may want to gossip. You will not care to be bothered with me, so you had better take him; it will be money in your pocket."

"Miss Grace, you are as much of a politician as you are a musician," said Alison at her elbow. "An argument like that should persuade anyone of my utility. But she still looks dubious, try again."

"Of course little captain will take you," said the major through the window. "I am taking the wife for a drive over to East Hampton or I would go. They need some one along, so let me delegate you instead of myself."

"But we really do not need a cavalier, major," protested Mrs. Holmes, smilingly.

"Yes you do, a rolling pig might upset your boat."

"I can swim."

"A warrior of the Montauk tribe might try to kidnap you in the woods."

"I can run."

"I rather think," suggested Alison, "that some one will be needed to cut the leaves of novels, and sharpen pencils for sketches."

"I have nothing strong enough to put against

that argument," laughed Mrs. Holmes. "If Grace will see to an extra slice of bread in the lunch-basket you can come along."

So they went down to the shore together, the three. But after getting the oars in the boat and arranging their books and lunch-basket, he said:

"I really had not thought of going with you until Miss Grace mentioned it. So if you would rather not have your little sociable encroached upon, I will hunt another point of the compass. I had this portfolio intending to make a break for the woods, and write to-day, so—"

"Oh you deserter!" began Grace. But Mrs. Holmes only remarked, brusquely, "get in," and then as he shoved off the boat and did so, she added, "no, I will do the rowing, that is why I come in a small boat. I like the exercise."

"Yes—going out," remarked Grace, ironically, "but our landlord said it took hard work to bring a boat back from that point when the tide is ebbing; I didn't dare mention it when on shore for fear of offending our captain, and being left ashore. But my prime reason for suggesting an escort was, that I might be certain of getting home for my supper."

The captain just turned her head for one withering glance at the confessor, and then went on rowing with the strong, flexible wrist movement that Alison noted and commended in silence. The slow color crept to her face as she sent the light boat evenly over the water. That bit of pink

in her cheeks took from her the coolness of the night before. She looked so much more human. And Alison, having just posted a long letter to Blanche, one written under the influence of their conversation in the starlight, and therefore an earnest one, had within him a sense of duty done that allowed him as a reward the luxury of to-day's indulgence.

He was very quiet, content only to watch her and remember her words of last night. Just once he addressed her directly, and then in a rather abrupt way.

"How did you know who I was when you saw me that day in the dining-room?"

He did not call her by name, but she answered at once, granting quick understanding of his meaning.

"There was a very bad wood-cut of you in one of the New York dailies a few weeks before, naturally I looked at it, and there happened to be enough likeness to recognize you by."

That was all, there was no further comment. It had puzzled him often to remember that glance across the tables, and at last his curiosity had prompted the query.

Up on the point of Mushammack they climbed, and from it the reach of water with its wooded bits jutting out into it, and the village away around the curve, and the fields in distant patches showing like a snow-fall in their decking of white daisies, and the shimmer of the waves below, and the scent of the near pines in the scrubby wood

back of them—it was all so fresh, so sweet with the breath of late June, that it put summer-time in the blood as one gazed.

"There are some delightfully stubborn corners of the world that refuse to be civilized," said Mrs. Holmes, drawing in great breaths of the salt air, "and I am glad to find so many of them around this end of the island."

"Yes," answered Alison, "the original growth of oak clings as closely to the soil as the original owners. I was surprised to find a village of Montauk descendants still farming and fishing on their old hunting-grounds so near the harbor. Some of them are of remarkably pure blood, and their somber eyes always seem to regard our race as interlopers, although they have grown too dignified to discuss the question with us of late years."

"They look witchy to me," acknowledged Grace. "I met one of the women on the road with a basket yesterday, and thought her a gypsy. I was cogitating whether or not to ask her to tell my fortune, but one look in her eyes when we came closer upset that idea. She was only a little taller than I, but she seemed to look down on me from immeasurable heights, and I collapsed, as it were. I have scarcely recovered my self-assurance as yet."

Mrs. Holmes said nothing that would lead him to think that she ever remembered the interview of last evening. She was once more the captain of the major. She was enjoying the morning, the

air, the surroundings, with the vim of impressions new born, stopping to analyze nothing, just content to exist and enjoy.

"I think I have a bit of Indian in my own blood," she remarked, as she settled herself with her back against a tree to sketch the little town in the circle of the bay; "the wild woods always attract me, and this point, with its Indian name, brought me out here, though I am sure its power would not have been so compelling had its name been Dawson's Point or Jenkins' Woods; it is the sympathy with the Indian nature, reaching toward their names."

"Their names are an awful jumble," protested Grace. "I can't see any beauty in them."

"That is because you do not learn their meanings," answered Alison; "most of them are very poetical—none are so insipid as ours that have superseded them. Do you know that to the most of them the milky way is called the way of the birds?"

"Why the way of the birds?" asked Grace, and Mrs. Holmes went on sketching, while their escort told them of the old idea, that the soul of our human dead took the form of a white bird, and so flew to the happy hunting-ground. And that the brood so loosed from prison, flew upward, upward until their wings felt of that air path leading to the great gate, and the light of the stars, shining on their snowy breasts, made a great glory in the nights, and so it was called the 'way of the birds.'"

That and many other bits of Indian history and mythology he told them, with the fishing and hunting-grounds of the Montauks spread around them, as the territory of many of the scenes.

It all seemed so natural that they should discuss those superstitions that arose from the untrained souls of those children of nature. They were so out of and above the world, there between the wood and the water, where the porpoise—rolling pigs—splashed and turned in the sunlight. And like three children let loose, they ran races along the sands, when the books and pencils grew heavy in the hands, and the fresh winds called them. And then Mrs. Holmes, with some pretty pink shells as trophies, again climbed up over the point, and from the wood above, could see the other two away along the beach, Grace filling both her own pockets and her escort's with the bits of shell or pebble that caught her eye. How well they looked together, she thought, he so tall, so dark; she so girlish and fair. They had sat down on the bow of the boat, and Grace was emptying her treasures into his hat, and evidently sorting them. They made a pretty summer picture; and again she picked up pencil and paper, and rapidly sketching, caught the outlines of the two figures, and then like a flash came the memory of that other day by the shore, and another blonde head that had leaned so near to his own, and she threw the tablet and pencil from her, and laid down in a tired fashion on the grass, her head on her arm. She fell to wondering if that other girl who was to

be his wife had blonde hair, or was she dark? was she gentle and homelike, or was she proud and stately?

She had not thought of it the night before. She had known only a little shock and then a strange wonder in her mind as he told her first of his intended marriage, and almost in the next breath that declaration of interest, that want of herself. She could almost hear the thrill in his tones as he had said:

"Can you understand that, too?"

Did she understand? Did he even understand himself as yet? She tried to think as she lay there, why did he feel the want of other companionship when he had his betrothed? The thought of fickleness entered her mind, but it did not belong to his eyes as she had known them, and she found herself whispering a rebellious "no" to the grass and the pink shells close beside her.

There was a half wish in her heart that there were no bonds of the future about him. She could never associate the idea of happiness with bonds of any kind.

That was no doubt a narrow view to take of it—a prejudiced view taken from the standard of her own experience. But he had been so frank with her—so evidently with a desire to be honest, and through it there had been that minor chord of feeling that asked understanding—that she wondered why it was all so. Did those bonds grow irksome? Why did he seem so alone in his work and ambitions?

And then she fell to thinking of this new, strange element that had crept into his manner toward her—half friendly, half protecting at times—in so many ways anticipating her wants—not in the way of a lover, but with a respectful tenderness that had seemed half pity. All at once that thought came to her—pity! Why should it be that? Could he know—did he know what her life had been? Was it that sorrow that had brought him to her?

Her hand clenched a little over the pink shells as she saw herself through his eyes, that there was what had led him to that impulse last night. It was not so much help for himself he asked as it was the desire to be close in her thoughts that he might help her—she had misunderstood him there on the porch. But she was sure now that it was only through very kindness of heart that he had spoken so. She liked him the better from arriving at that conviction, though through it all was a sense of rebellious pride. Why was she to be thus set aside from other cared-for, care-free women?—placed on a level where people should think of her with pity, and she could not resent it. She had not used to think of it like this. For so long a time she had been content only with the sense of her late freedom, and now! She scarcely knew what had changed it all. How those tones of his voice would persist in recurring to her! How would that other woman think of her when she heard how she came to live alone, though married? Would she be coolly cautious

until informed of the same, or would she be gushingly pitiful? And the woman laying there felt half savagely that she could not stand either —not from his wife. She would go away again, she and black Liza. Yes, she would drop out of his life when the summer was ended.

But soft through the sunshine of the day came the echo of night words: "Can you understand that, too?"

Why did they haunt her like that? why did they fill her with so great an unrest? She had tried to speak wisely to him. But long into the night she had questioned her own rebellious heart, and the day dawn had brought her no answer that she dared whisper even to herself.

A step near her caused her to raise her head. Alison stood a few feet away, looking at her anxiously.

"You are ill, Mrs. Holmes?" he asked, crossing to her quickly. But she shook her head.

"Ill? no. Why should you think so?" she asked the question half irritably. "I was sleepy, I suppose, that was all."

"Sleepy! then you slept badly?"

"I believe not. Why should I?" her tone had a shade more of annoyance in it. To him it sounded cold.

"You are very far away from me to-day," he said, as he looked at her. "I fear I drove you away last night."

"Not far," she answered, laconically, reaching for her Tam O'Shanter, and looking about for her

pencil. It lay at his feet, and he picked it up, passing it to her in silence; also the tablet, at which he did not glance.

"Not too far to get a tolerably fair likeness of you," she added, in a more friendly way, showing him the sketch.

"Yes, it is good," he said, holding it out at arm's length to get the best effect, and then he glanced quickly down at her. "But why did you throw it away against that tree, and why the pencil flung in the grass? and see! some of your pretty shells crushed; have you had a destructive fit?"

An instant later he was sorry he had spoken. She said nothing, only looked at him. But through that gaze he read the remembrance of another sketch, and without words he could understand the impulse that had flung from her the paper with his face on it.

"I am a great blunderer," he said, after a little. "You thought very badly of me that day."

"Yes;" again there was no pretense of not understanding. "I thought you very unworthy."

"Could you not know enough of the world to understand that one can not all at once step out of the mud of mistakes? or stepping out, that it takes some time to clean from one's shoes the soil where one's feet have wandered?" he asked, in a slow way. It was an awkward subject. He wondered what other woman he could feel like explaining it to. "If you could only understand a little more of the deficiencies of human nature?"

"Do I not?" she said, with a tinge of bitterness; "I have surely learned that, if no other;" and then after a little, she added: "And it made me doubtful of much, and the sward looked a very comfortable place to lounge in that day, and it has surprised me the more in the light of this new statement of yours—your engagement."

"I know you think I was false to my position toward her, as well as undeserving of your faith. But I wish you would believe that the day you saw me was an unwelcome echo from an empty past; one you helped me free from."

"I? should you not have freed yourself for the sake of another? you had a right to."

"Yes, you are right. But one needs help to do the right thing sometimes, and my—Miss Athol does not know—I mean, does not think seriously as you do; few girls do, I believe."

"Do you mean that she knows at all—has any idea of that worst side of your life?"

She evidently could not keep the amazement from her tones, and it made him feel a little as he had felt about marriage depending only on ceremony. Blanche and himself seemed to have but *papier-maché* foundations for affection whenever he was drifted into discussing themselves with this woman; it disturbed him, made him dissatisfied in a way.

"Well, you see it is the fault of society, I suppose," he began, in an explanatory way. "She has seen a good deal of it all her life, and is too bright not to keep her ears open. Well, girls

get used to the idea that the men of their set waste a good many days in passing time instead of improving it. And she knew—yes, she understood that I was no better; that the chances were I might be even a little worse than the most of them."

She could only look at him. She had not been a society girl herself. She had been very ignorant of many things. Men had been to her grand, strong ideals as a girl; she had dreamed them in dreamy fashion little less than gods. Had the gods all died since those days, or had her romances, her heroes of right, all been lies?

"You puzzle me, sometimes," she said, at last, "and much as I want to, I am not sure that I like either you or Miss—Miss Athol did you say? Not for past unworthiness, not for past mistakes, but because of the view you each seem to take of it now. It does not seem the right thing."

"You mean that we look at it too carelessly?"

"Yes. You have something better in you. I can not fancy you as content with the superficial."

"I am not sure I have been. Who knows what we may be?"

"I know what you ought to be—what your work ought to be; a thing strong enough to wipe out all mistakes of the past," she said, energetically.

Down over the bluff they could hear Grace singing "Blue Juniata." One could imagine her that bright Alferatta but for her blonde hair. How girlish and care-free the voice was!

"Is Miss Athol like that?" she asked, nodding her head toward the beach.

"No! Not at all. She never was."

"You must tell me of her some day," she continued, "I do not know many women," and then: "Is she pretty?"

"She is thought attractive by those who know her," he answered; "but, at first glance, one would not think her a beauty."

"I like pretty women—to look at," she said, "I like them as I would pictures or statuary—from a picturesque point of view. But no doubt the sort you describe in her—pretty to those who know her—is the best to wear. Yes, I should think it the best for a wife."

He picked up the bits of broken shell, pink and shattered, slipping them idly from hand to hand.

"You have broken those pretty things," he said, regretfully, for in a sense he felt himself the cause. "Will you take these instead? I think something could be made of them—bracelet or necklace."

They were all soft, pretty tints of cream, and pink, and orange, here and there a glistening white one, all looking like so many leaves of shattered roses.

"They are lovely," and she held her hands to receive them. One of them dropped, the prettiest, of course. Each bent to pick it up. Her head was lowest, and she did not see how close he bent above her; but the drooped head and the

white neck were so close, so close! Her hair brushed his cheek, then his lips, and for an instant his fingers pressed a loose bronze lock against the eager red of his mouth. Quick it was done, and quickly he drew back, feeling like a thief, when she raised those clear eyes all unconsciously to his.

He rose to his feet and walked over to the edge of the bluff.

"What the devil made me do that?" he asked himself, half savagely, "am I, after all, as loose in my ideas as the man whose namesake Grace says I am?" He walked back and forth, glancing at every turn toward that woman sitting there silently sorting those shells.

"No," he soliloquized, "the ideas and theories of the correct thing are steady enough in my head. But—I wonder if I am worse than other men? I suppose I must be, for I always find my emotions and feelings playing the deuce with my straight-laced principles."

"Do you not think that would make a pretty brooch?" she said, turning her head toward him. "Oh you are away over there. I thought you almost in reach of me."

"I am now," he answered, crossing to her; while to himself he was thinking: "And you make me want never to go beyond the reach of your hands."

He did not feel that he was in love with her, it was not that. He had been grateful to her. He had been sorry for her, and her earnest sym-

pathies had made him want to keep her always as a close friend. All that he could understand and find a reason for; but this desire for the entire possession of her heart and thoughts that had made him say what he had last night, and that had filled him just now with a sort of insanity to touch her with his lips if only for once!

He told himself it was not love, he found himself looking at her moodily and thinking of the magnetism that, unconscious of itself, yet sways and attracts all in its reach. Was that the secret? Could it all be explained by a mere scientific theory? And yet what a cold-blooded way to think of that soft, girlish form and the sweet lips with their cool, firm curves; again and again his eyes would wander back to them.

How coolly she could reason for others, he thought; yet that mouth needed all its firm lines to keep it from being altogether voluptuous. It was formed as that magnificent thing of Milo whose impenetrable gaze attracts, and whose lips lure one in spirit to kisses. Thus had each meant to appeal only to the mind, to the thing that whispered of ambitions; but, almost before he knew it, something akin to a soul answered through him to every glance—every tone coined for him.

What strong, white fingers she had as she dallied with the shells. He had never before found himself caring much for the strong, decided order of women. The pretty, soft tints had made the most alluring pictures to him, and that was another

irritation. She went against all his ideas of women who had been pleasant to him in the past. She was in some respects masterful; a charm which should appeal only to his intellect. He found himself calling her little captain in his thoughts as the major had done; from that he drifted to her name of Judith, she who had been the avenger of her people. A character formed for sacrifice and religion, one whose strong hands had been bathed in a man's blood. He wondered if that other Judith had those same flexible fingers, he knew she had never that same warm beauty of mouth; ah! that mouth where the pearls gleamed! His thoughts went with a flush of anger to that other man who must have kissed her, her husband, and something like an oath raised her eyes inquiringly to his face.

"Yes," he said, hastily, "I think the two pink ones would be pretty on a silver bar. Is that not the idea? Do you think the shells are strong enough to be riveted?"

So narrow was the line that summer day between the rippling of meadow brooks and the shadowy abysses where souls struggle in the deeps.

There was a sort of electricity in the air that conveyed the spirit of earnestness to each, through the bulwark of carelessness that was raised so high. But eyes tell so much when they avoid each other so persistently, and they found themselves speaking rather eagerly of trifles, and wonderfully afraid of silence.

Brave was the warrior bold,
The love of Alferatta!

sang Grace below them, and with cheeks flushed, and fair hair flying, she came up over the bank, scattering constraint, and sinking down restfully on the sward. "Oh, I think it is glorious out here!" she panted; "the sand is so warm. I had my shoes off down there wiggling my toes in it—oh, no! I do not suppose it looked very dignified, but it felt good."

"Never mind the lack of dignity, then," said Alison, "it is feelings instead of conventionalities that influence us most anyway."

"There," said Grace, triumphantly, "I knew the instincts of Fra Lippo would make themselves apparent if I only had patience to wait. I forgive you lots of straight-laced ideas for that one bit of truth."

"How do you know it is truth?" he asked, quizzically.

"Why, all the novelists show us that, unless it is the horrible pessimist stories—is not that the word? I mean the ones whose people do all the things they ought to, and live unhappy ever after. That is not the sort you write, is it, Fra Lippo?"

"No; I let them do all the things they ought not to, and then give them their dose of unhappiness as a punishment—that is novelists' justice, you know."

"Is it?" queried Grace, dubiously; "well, it looks to me like putting a boy in easy reach of a

neighbor's orchard, and then making him sick because he had a boy's appetite."

"Pretty good simile, Miss Grace," agreed Alison, lazily; "but what would you have me write?"

"Oh, love stories, of course; none others are interesting. But I want the people, if they are nice, to get everything they want, and only the dark, deep-dyed villains must be left broken-hearted."

"But do you not think those individuals would be just the ones whose hearts would be too tough to break?" asked Mrs. Holmes.

"Then slash out the villain and have all the people good, even if they are a little namby-pamby; anything, so long as you finish them up happily, with fortunes and weddings galore."

"Suppose, though, that you want to begin instead of ending them with the wedding?" remarked Alison.

"Well, then, I'd—no, I guess I wouldn't know how to manage them that way. The romance should come before the wedding, not after."

"But the things that should be so seldom are," said Mrs. Holmes; "many lives never have any romance; one need not go to novels to learn that."

Alison looked at her, but she did not raise her eyes. The shells he had suggested for the silver bar were still in her hands. Her attention was evidently given as much to their tints as to the subject discussed.

"Well, when I write a novel," began Grace,

and then straightened herself up in much dignity when they laughed.

"An opera singer, a novelist, and what else?" asked Alison, enumerating them on his fingers.

"Well, I will do something to distinguish myself, or I never could rest in my grave after I was gone—no, I could not. And my novel, if I write one, shall have all the things that should be. I will have a lovely woman in it, one like some one we know, Fra Lippo, some one with bronze hair, who is so lovely, so gracious, that one's brothers, and fathers, and all, fall in love with her. And she must be a sort of latter-day Undine—a lovely creature without a soul—only an intellect, you know, until some day he comes—the hero, I mean —and he looks at her, and she looks at him, and her soul is given to her through love. And then he knows what he has been searching for always among the people he met; and then she knows what she has been waiting for—it has been for him. And straightway there is no other man, and there is no other woman in the world for either of them. And so they go together hand in hand until they are old and—and that is all."

"Given like a thing of inspiration," commented Alison. "But you make no allowance for the accepted idea of the rough current of true love," he spoke lightly, but the words, "and straightway there was no other man and no other woman in the whole world for either of them," thrilled in his ears, and his eyes met those of the

woman opposite. Why did she look at him like that? and why did her eyes glisten as if with tears? Was it at the thought of being shut out forever from such placid love? And why did the word "darling" leap to his own eyes as plain almost as his lips could have spoken it? Ah! those unanswerable things which the heart prompts. It was only for one electric instant, and both faces were a trifle changed, as Grace continued her ideas of stories. He could feel himself grow pale, and could see her own face flush, and neither felt like speaking for a little while. Voices are so hard to master sometimes, harder even than the eyes.

"There should be no rough currents," went on Grace; "and the marriage should be a beautiful ideal one—like this one in 'The story of Arnon,' when Azenath chose her human lover in preference even to a son of God. And there never must be doubt, or jealousy, or anything to come between them."

"But something does come in that story," said Mrs. Holmes, at last. "Death comes."

"Oh, yes," agreed Grace, "but only for a little while. Who could imagine Arnon living on and on after she was gone? I could not."

"You are an extremest," said Alison. "You could kill them both without qualms of conscience, but object to anyone else giving them a little worry."

"Yes, if the worry in a love story means separation, or misunderstanding, or any of those

horrid things novelists make use of to end them miserably. It would be better to be dead."

"It would be better to be dead," he repeated, as he got up and walked out along the edge of the bluff.

"Fra Lippo looks as if he had struck an inspiration and wanted to get away from our frivolous selves in order to let it mature," remarked Grace; and then, after a little, she said: "I wonder if he is thinking of her? He sort of looks as if he might be."

"Of whom?"

"Why, of Blanche Athol. I have heard Tom quizzing her about him. But when I saw him that day at Oyster Bay, I never imagined that A. D. Alison was the Dale I had heard her speaking of. I never would have thought he would be her style."

"Why not 'her style?'" there was the merest touch of asperity in the tone.

"Oh, because he is too serious, I think. But he was not always so, or else they were mistaken. I remember hearing that her *fiancé* was awfully fast. I can't remember just who said it. Blanche is rather hard to manage herself, at least they say that Mrs. Julian, her married sister, who chaperons her, has her hands full. Blanche is always doing something sensational."

"Mr. Alison might not care to hear you say so," admonished the other.

"Well, I don't intend that he shall," returned Grace, frankly. "But he must know, as every

one else does, that Blanche Athol is an awful flirt. Papa says she began to coo and make eyes coquettishly in her cradle, and she has kept it up ever since."

"Yes."

"Um," assented Grace, trying to button her shoe with her fingers. "Say, Mrs. Holmes, lend me a hairpin, will you? Please let me call you Judith, just as Mrs. Winans does? it's so much nicer; can I? Oh, you're a darling!" as Mrs. Holmes smiled assent. And then her bright, young eyes wandered again to that figure on the bluff. "And did you notice how he repeated those words?" she continued, "and how quick he got up and went away? Papa says they will never get along together. Perhaps Fra Lippo thinks so, too, and its the idea of separation that worries him."

"Oh, you romancer!" laughed Mrs. Holmes. "I am afraid Mr. Alison is much too practical for you to make a melancholy hero of, and no doubt he and Miss Athol are very well satisfied with each other."

"Well, perhaps he don't know all yet," debated Grace. "I guess he has been working awfully hard lately. Papa says he has been cutting society. But Blanche does not. She was going abroad this summer, but whimsically changed her mind at the last moment and upset all the Julians' plans. And Fra Lippo ought to remember that when he is not with her some one else is, sure. It's been Dick Haverly lately, they say, and the things I've heard—"

"Grace," said Mrs. Holmes, rising to her feet, "I would rather not hear anything more on the subject. I may meet Miss Athol some day, and prefer not to be prejudiced."

"Why, bless you, I—I didn't want to prejudice you," said Grace, quickly; "only—well, I don't believe when you do meet her that you will think her any more your style than he is hers. It's all wrong some way, and since I've known him a little I'm sorry. Yes, I am. He is so good and so considerate, and just as the major says, he is such a good fellow."

"Suppose you get him to wait until you are quite grown, and then marry him yourself to be sure he is appreciated?" suggested Mrs. Holmes, teasingly.

"Stop it!" laughed Grace. "I would not be a bit of an improvement on Blanche. I might be even worse. But I like him so well. And do you know he is just the sort of person I would like to have in a love story such as I intend to write, and when he would meet the right woman there should be no one else in their lives ever again. And he would know that at last he had come into his own."

"Into his own," said Alison, who had just come up back of them. "Is it an inheritance, Miss Grace?" She glanced at him saucily.

"Yes, Fra Lippo, it is an inheritance. One that I wonder if you will know as your own when you come to it—in novels they do not, sometimes."

He glanced from Grace to Mrs. Holmes.

"Oh, it is only another romance of Grace's," she explained. "She is in a visionary mood to-day."

"Well, it is all the fault of 'The Story of Arnon,'" said the embryo novelist. "I am a spongy, impressionable creature, and it has saturated my feeble mind with beautiful pictures and vistas of romance;" and then she began to laugh quietly. "I think, when I go home, I will read that to the major," she said, wickedly; "he flies from anything with sentiment in it, and to punish him for calling me silly at the stile last night, I am going to read him those love songs."

"Don't bear malice, Miss Grace," said Alison, lighting a cigar, and speaking between puffs; "you are too good a girl."

"Don't be too blind to know your own when you come to it, Fra Lippo," she answered, mimicking him with a bit of twig in her mouth; "for I may want you to help me out with my novel, and besides, you are too good a fellow."

"Thanks," he said, good-humoredly. "If I find myself too blind I may come to you to be led."

"You may come right now," she said, promptly, "and I will lead you for a walk—both of you. Judith needs a rest. She is the only one of us who has anything to show for to-day's work. I don't believe you have written a dozen lines, Fra Lippo—shameful waste of valuable time."

"Then I had better set to work at once and

waste no more," he said, reaching for a portfolio; but Grace got it first.

"No you don't," she said, capturing it. "Major sent you as an escort, and your duty is to see that we don't get stuck in the mud, or kidnapped by the Montauks. I want to explore the woods and see how far back they reach. You must go as cavalier, and as the proper thing for an individual of my age is a chaperon, Mrs. Holmes must be the martyr and come along."

And stacking books and emptied lunch-basket against a tree, they started from the shore back into the shadowy woods where the tall ferns grew knee-high with here and there white shells from the sea imbedded about their brown roots.

Grace amused herself by darting ahead until she was hidden by the shrubbery, and then giving vent to shrill yelps in staccato fashion that she fondly imagined were imitations of Indian war-whoops.

"I heard them bark like that at the Wild West show," she explained to them, as if too honest to claim undeservingly any credit for being the founder of this new school of music. "And I did not think them at all terrific—neither their whoop nor their war dance. I can do that, too; I did it for papa after we came home that evening, and as a reward he wouldn't let me go even to a theatre for a month after. This is it."

And straightway Miss Grace began her dance with thumbs pointed heavenward and an alternate lifting of feet, as if the thing they stood

on was too hot for comfort, the while moving in dismal sort of time to slow monotone of song that sounded like an introduction to the demon music of a pantomime.

Her auditors, more critical than enthusiastic, tried, between fits of laughter, to bribe her to cease, a bribery she spurned as all art should.

"You're jealous," she said, after she had brought the dance to a close by a series of yelps that would have done credit to a Comanche; "that's why you insist that the thumb part of the dance is Chinese. That only goes to prove that I am an artist capable of blending the poetry of motion of two races into a grand masterpiece that would astonish specimens of either nation."

"It undoubtedly would," assented Alison, dryly, "what an unappreciative parent, not to encourage your talent in that direction."

"That's irony," she said, nodding her head sagaciously at Judith. "High art can afford to ignore such trifles, therefore, I ignore it. I am not at all egotistical, but I know jealousy when I see it."

And striding with a tragic air through the ferns and grass she was soon out of sight in the shrubbery.

The other two found conversation a difficult thing to manage, and so when left alone with the silence of the woods about them, he grew quiet in a way that might have been half moody, as he would stand watching her collect the green feathers and bright bits of leaves or grass that

went to make up a great bouquet with the sweet, wild smell of the earth clinging to them.

He thought she was right when she had laid claim to a touch of Indian nature. Not else, he thought, could she so busy herself in the little secrets of the herbs, questioning the moss growth of its faithfulness to the cold, repelling stone where it crept; drawing great armfuls of sweet bay toward her, and burying her face in its cool leaves, closing her eyes in drunken fashion at its fragrance. As quick as Grace in darting under branches and through shrubbery for a bit of bright-hued treasure, she was yet more silent.

"All nature seems one's own personal possession when one has the wildness of the woods so close about one," she said, in answer to that steady, curious look of his at the embrace of the branches.

"All passive nature," he corrected. "I know your sweeping assertions really apply only to the herbs you gather, pretty leaves that look bright for a few hours but are unconscious of your care."

"I am never sure they are unconscious," she returned, quickly, as if to skip over the suggestion underlying that remark. He knew the tone of that speech was contemptible in him, but all his quiet watching of the girlish, provoking form had found vent in that half protest.

"They do not seem passive to me," she continued, "the things of the woods always keep fresh for me so long—longer by far than cultivated flowers—and that is an unusual thing you

know, so I have made up my mind they are not unconscious, they have a soul for me."

"You give it to them," he said, and turned away as she looked questioningly at him. An instant more of those eyes on his, and he knew he would have said: "I do not wonder, you awaken theirs as you do mine, you draw souls to you, and arouse temptations to ask for all your own in return."

Did she guess at all of that struggle under the terseness of his tone? She grew silent again, making no sign. And they walked on, on through the broken paths after Grace. And the sky grew darker by spells as clouds seemed to drop lower over the tree-tops, and the birds began to twitter to each other of coming change.

"We shall have a storm to-night," she said, glancing upward.

"And the night is not so far off as you might imagine," he replied, glancing at his watch, "it is almost six o'clock."

"So late!" she said in surprise, "where has the day gone?"

"It has not gone unrecorded at least," he began, and then stopped, setting his teeth determinedly with the vow to let no more words be drawn from him by impulse or circumstances. He would not let her think him so altogether weak.

"We must find Grace; we must go back at once," she said, hurriedly. "We have come a long way from the shore have we not? It will be late when we get home."

"I think we have walked farther than we have realized," he answered; "we shall learn that when we attempt to retrace our steps. And our trip across the water will take some time. Yes, we had better hurry if we want a hot dinner."

Grace, perched on a fence away ahead of them, refused to come back until they paid her a visit.

"I can see away down the road," she shouted, "and there's a buggy coming this way; I do believe it's the major. Let us wait and see, never mind if it does rain, we won't melt."

Sure enough, it was the major, and Mrs. Winans smiling a little nervously as she glanced up at the darkening clouds.

"Out here yet?" called the major from the road. "It's time you young folks were heading toward home."

"We are going," answered Grace, "I only waited to see if it was you—sure. What have you got in the basket."

"Peaches!" said the major, smacking his lips in appreciation. "Beauties; great, big, yellow fellows from Maryland. Come, jump into the buggy. You can have your share now."

"She must wait for her share," called Mrs. Holmes, "we must go back to the boat at once."

"Perhaps she had better drive back with us," suggested Mrs. Winans; "the wind is rising—it will be one less to carry across the water."

The three picnickers glanced at each other.

"No," said Mrs. Holmes, rather hastily, "that would never do; you must not turn deserter."

"But it does seem a sensible plan," debated Grace, "getting home will take hard work against the wind, and then think of the peaches, Judith! I will have some with cream on for you by the time you get home. Say yes, that's a good girl."

"No, no, we are only wasting valuable time discussing it. Come, don't be bribed by peaches."

There was an instant's indecision, and then the major said, insinuatingly:

"There is a box of Maillard's chocolate creams in my pocket for somebody."

That settled it. The "somebody" made a wild lunge over the fence, calling as she went:

"Look after my book of 'Arnon,' Fra Lippo, I don't dare ask Judith, because she disapproves of my weakness, but I will have your peaches and cream ready for you when you get home. Good-bye! Take double care of her because you have only one to look after now. Major, which pocket is the box in?"

And with a deprecating smile from Mrs. Winans, and a victorious laugh from the major, the buggy whirled down the road, leaving those two standing there alone under the threatening sky.

"Well this is rather—" he began, and then hesitated a moment. When he spoke again it was only to remark: "That was rather quick work."

"Never mind," she said, as if trying to persuade herself not to mind; "we must make the best of it."

And from the tone of each a third person would have said that neither appeared anxious for that *tête-à-tête* journey home.

"Come, we may as well start at once," he said, brusquely. "Let me carry those things for you."

"Those things" were the ferns and grasses of which he had felt so nearly jealous. But she shook her head, gathering them close up to her in one arm.

"Thanks, no. I can manage them, and myself, too, very nicely." The latter part of the speech was in reply to an offered hand in walking over a swampy place in the meadow path.

The wind had risen suddenly and was blowing a regular gale, while the clouds shifted and drifted in great banks overhead. Alison glanced dubiously at them and dropped back a step or so until he was close beside her.

"That wind is rather sweeping as it comes across here," he remarked. "I may shelter you from it a little."

"What? I could not hear you," she panted, as a strong gust of wind lifted her Scotch cap and an instant later would have carried it away, but that he caught it, and with her one free hand and both of his the unruly article was pulled down over her hair; the hair he had kissed unknown to her, but from which he turned deliberately now. One is in part the conqueror who knows his own weakness.

"I may shelter you some from this side," he

half shouted, for they were nearer the timber and the noise of the wind greater. "That was what I was trying to say."

"Never mind. I like storms, and am strong enough to stand alone."

Just for a moment a lull in the wind made clear a word he was impelled to at the picture of that slight form in the world's gales; it was:

"Always?"

"I hope so," she said, looking up at him clearly as she could with the wind in her eyes. "Yes, I shall have to."

It was the first time her position had ever been touched on between them. Was it the fault of the magnetic currents of the storm that permeated themselves, and made vision and speech clear-cut and incisive.

"I hope, then, that the storms will all be light ones," he said; and she bowed her head as if to tell him she heard, but no word was spoken until they reached the edge of the timber.

Just for a little she halted there, glancing up at the changeful evening sky, back over the meadow, and then into the wood, all so changed! everything grown so dark. All the light left in the heavens was the streaks of dull red and copper that looked like reflections from some immense furnace.

"It all looks weird, uncanny," she said, smiling vaguely, but not looking at him, "it is because of the sudden change, I suppose."

"Yes," he assented, and then that moment's halting of hers made him wonder in a half irrita-

ted fashion as if he had made her doubt him by his own confessions.

"Are you afraid?" he asked abruptly.

Then she did look at him.

"Afraid! of what?"

"Of the storm of course," he added, rather hastily.

And she smiled up at him as she said: "It's not five minutes since I told you I liked them. Has the wind blown your memory away?"

"You had better come on," he said, as if not hearing her question.

"Yes, I will come," she said, taking a step further into the wood. "Its all very uncanny-looking ahead there, but — yes, we must go on."

Yes, no matter how doubtfully we look into the future, still the past that is so eager to swallow up all that is, drives souls onward to meet that which is to be.

Was it some such thought that checked the woman there that evening at the edge of the wood and the edge of the storm?

No rain had fallen, only the threats murmured through distant thunder, and far off the lightning flashes prepared them for anything as they hurried through the trees. He had offered his arm, which she refused with a smiling shake of her head.

"Is she so afraid of touching me?" he asked himself half-savagely; and together with that was a half-resolve to leave the next day. Something was always giving him an impulse to say just the

things he had no right to say, and—yes, he would go away.

"Look out there!" he warned, as some round bowlders half-hidden by ferns made an uncertain foothold. "I know you are too independent to want assistance, but you may not resent a warning."

"Certainly not," she said, trying to laugh carelessly; "warnings are always in order, but I have considerable mule in my composition when it comes to my feet, and am used to standing on my own responsibility," and then suddenly, she asked: "Should we not surely be near the boat by this time?"

"Does the way seem so long then?" He did not add, "with me" but the tone implied it, and her avoidance of him provoked it, scattering what little judgment he had left.

"I did not say so," she said quietly, and he strode on a step ahead of her in silence that seemed moody, and a little later she added in a half-hesitating way: "You are not like yourself this evening. I think you are inclined to be a little hard on me in your thoughts."

"Don't speak like that," he answered abruptly. "You don't know what you are saying to me."

She only looked at him, but did not speak, and after a little he said: "Try to pardon that speech, it sounds rude to you, but I—I did not mean to be that, and I don't want you to think so our last evening together, for I believe I am going away to-morrow."

"Going away!" for the first time she reached out her hand to him; was it because of the words or for the same reason that she gave a low cry an instant later, and stumbled forward, falling to her knees.

"Wait a moment," she said, holding his hands and leaning against him; only an instant he held her so, looking down at her eyes that were closed. After a little she spoke again, rather uncertainly.

"It made me faint, just at first. I was certain of nothing but your hands," then she tried to raise herself by his help.

"It is my foot," she began, and a half moan of pain broke from her; "I can not stand on it," she whispered.

He said nothing. The clasp of her fingers, the shivering pressure of her form against him, as he bent over her, took from him the desire for speech. He could but think in a wild fashion of the sweetness of it, that had a sort of fear as a background.

"Let me help you," and his arm, circling her waist, gave him a guilty feeling, simply because it gave him a pleasure he dared not acknowledge.

"I can not," as she tried with his assistance to walk; "I can not even step on my foot. I think I sprained my ankle on the stone that slipped."

He glanced from her to the path ahead of them, through the woods that were growing darker, and through which he could not yet see the gleam of the water.

"Yes," she said, trying to smile, "it is a long way; and what in the world am I to do?"

"Try again," he suggested, with a grim determination not to indulge himself in the one method by which he could have got her to the boat, "lean on my arm—now!"

Another trial, and her face whitened with pain, as she sank limply on the ground. "Ah, how can you make me try when you see that I can not."

The piteous appeal was wrung from her by the pain, and that deadly faintness that followed it, and in a moment all his bonds of restraint were broken by that protest against what she felt was his cruelty to her. And when she opened her eyes his arms were about her, and her head on his knee.

"You go," she whispered, "send some one—a doctor, I suppose—it may be broken. But please hurry."

"I will not leave you," he said, decidedly.

"But really I am not afraid; it will not be long to wait. They can drive back for me, you know, and—and—please go."

Her eyes were raised so pleadingly to his face; was she pleading against her own wish as well as his? He did not stop to reason the question then. He only read in a vague way that while the voice, trying to master itself, said "go," the eyes, unconscious through pain, said "stay."

"I will not," he muttered, and his face dropped a little lower over her own.

There was only the woods and the storm about them, and in the shelter of his arms, content was trying to creep through the faintness and pain.

"No?" she said, making a last effort to be simply inquiring, and raising herself a little higher from his knee. And then meeting his eyes she could go no further; what was told in that one gaze for which neither could summon a mask? Whatever it was, the wind whistled by unheeded, the storm passed from their knowledge, and through the dusk they could see only each the soul of the other.

"No!" she tried to say again, smiling weakly. But the whispered word was silenced by his face close against hers, and in the domain she had deemed "uncanny," the seal of their lives was stamped by a kiss.

Were there any words spoken in that confession? Neither could ever tell. But after this sweetness of silence he spoke, and his voice with its new tone sounded odd and strange.

"I must get you home quickly, it is growing dark."

"Yes," and her eyes raised to his dropped again, and she turned her face close into the hollow of his elbow in a half-shamed way.

"And you must let me carry you."

There was a little silence, and then, her voice still from the covert against his coat, said:

"But—can you?"

"Can I!" How care free, how boyish his laugh sounded! He thought as he heard it, "when

have I laughed like that before?" Carry her? why the world seemed but a feather-weight in the light of this new possession.

Yes, about them was the gathered storm, beyond them wind and tide to fight against over the course they must take together. It was a prophecy of lives to be lived. But a kiss had drawn a veil over past and future. Just then the knowledge of possession made life a thing lovely to be lived, and he drew her closer, and laughed down at her.

"Can I! and will I?" he said, stubbornly drawing her face around until he could see it. "Yes, you can tell Grace I do know my own when I come to it."

Then her arms crept about his throat, she was lifted to his breast together with the mass of ferns at touch of which he laughed again, as he carried his burden of love back over the wood-path that had brought them into so strange a land.

"Those poor leaves!" he said happily. "How short a time since I was jealous of them!" and then Grace's words recurred to him again, and he said softly, "my own."

She did not answer, she had said no word. She had given herself into his arms, what need was there of words after that. But all the while there rang something in her ears that said "false, false!"

She knew it was a sweet lie they had cheated themselves with for one delirious moment. She knew she was false as a wife, that she had been

ever since that day in Oyster Bay when watching him dash his boat straight out to the Sound he had drawn her thoughts after him. She knew there was some one else, that other girl to whom she was making him a traitor. And she laughed a little bitterly as her arms relaxed, and she looked up in his face and said:

"How much easier it is to advocate high ideals for others, than to follow the simplest code of morals for ourselves."

"Put your arms back as they were," he commanded, tenderly, "and don't speak like that."

"I will if I want to. If I am a thief, why should I not acknowledge it?"

"You are not that"—and he tried to draw her face closer to his and stop her speech, but she drew aside.

"I am that," she said, calmly, "and much more. I am a liar when I have tried to have you think me better than I am—so much better than I have been of late. I have been," and she looked up at him—"I have been coveting my neighbor's goods, and worse than that, I have tried to steal them while my neighbor is away."

Again there was the quick attempt to draw her face to his.

"Don't do that! I would not if I were you," she said, curtly. "Go and kiss some good woman —some one who does not deceive you with fair, false witness for herself!"

"Judith!"

"Yes, that is the woman you said I was like,"

she continued, ironically; "the woman with earnest religious tendencies, the woman of grand sacrifices! Why did you not call me a Frou-Frou? I have much more of her timbre in me."

"You are unjust to yourself," he said, decidedly. "It may be a misfortune to you that this has occurred, but it is not a crime—at least the fault is not yours. We both tried to reason ourselves out of it. I know now that you did. But whatever the result is, you must never blame yourself to me. I know you, dear, too well."

She did not answer, and a little later the broken quiver of her breath told him she was crying.

He could say nothing. He knew now that the past days had been a strain on her that he had not guessed, and he felt guilty when he thought of how he had added to it. Down into the boat he carried her, where the wind rocked their light craft as if it were one of the pink shells they had gathered. Carefully he placed her that the injured foot should not suffer from wrench or lurch, and then looked across the foamy waters that were not likely to reassure one who was ill or nervous.

"Are you afraid?" he asked.

"With you?" and what avowal of love could mean more than the words and tone, and then she said: "Come here!"

He dropped on his knee beside her, steadying the boat with one oar thrust in the sand.

"I am not a good woman," she said, reaching up and passing her hand along his face. "I

never am quite sure when I think of heaven. But now—to-night, I should have no fear of death. I think I should be glad. Happiness can not last like—like—you know, and I think it would be easier to go down under the waves than to live and know it must change."

"Do not dream of any change in our thoughts," he said, earnestly; "that will never come.

"We do not know—a storm has brought us this stolen happiness—who knows what the calm may bring?"

Who knows—who ever knows? And her woman's eyes turned wistfully—always will turn wistfully back toward those shadows, where thoughts unspeakable had been granted expression.

CHAPTER IX.

Ah, me! how easily things grow wrong.
A sigh too much, or a kiss too long!
And there follows a mist and a sweeping rain,
And life is never the same again.

"A real adventure, wasn't it?" said Grace, appreciatingly. "How delightful!"

"Delightful to be laid up with a sprained ankle," queried Mrs. Holmes, ironically.

"No, of course I'm sorry to see you suffer, and you did, awfully, didn't you, dear? No, those things are only romantic in theory."

"They are not according to any theory of mine."

"Oh, you know what I mean—not the ankle—the rest of it."

"The rest of it?" repeated Mrs. Winans, in mild questioning. "My dear Grace, when you do air your ideas, try and make them more explicit."

"You dear bit of prunes and prisms," said the girl, darting toward the old lady, and treating her to a convulsive hug. "You're as bad as papa, and worse than Tom. You know I mean the rest of the—the episode—is that correct? the picturesque helplessness, and a cavalier to carry you in his arms; how delightful; wish it had been I. Say, Judith, did you imagine him Captain Kidd carrying you away to the stormy seas? I should have had a whole romance conjured up by the time he had landed the boat and lugged you home."

"Lugged would not sound romantic, I fear," suggested the cripple.

"N—no, it is rather matter of fact. But I should imagine that getting you here was a practical affair for him—a muscular one at all events—the pull across that bay in the wind was a terror."

"Yes;" and Mrs. Winans raised her brows ever so slightly.

"A most difficult feat for one man single-handed and alone to accomplish," said Grace, in parrot-like fashion, dropping a courtesy at the finish.

"Am I a nonentity, then?" asked Mrs. Holmes, plaintively, "he had two hands, and he was not alone; that is if I count for anything."

"Which you decidedly did," remarked Grace, frankly. "You counted for about 110 pounds when he carried you up them steps, and his face flushed as if he'd caught a fever from your sprained ankle."

"Grace!"

"Well, he did; but don't be alarmed, he's over it this morning. I saw him at breakfast, and he looked interestingly natural as usual; asked how you are; can he come to see you, or be of any use in any way, etc., etc."

They wheeled the sofa on which she lay close up to the window of her sitting-room, and out across the verandah she could get a view of the bay, sleeping in peace through the late morning to make amends for its riotous lashing through the wakeful night.

"How still it looks," she thought, a little bitterly. "How well it hides the dark possibilities under its surface. It is as much of a liar as I am."

Up across the meadow she saw a tall form striding over the short grass toward the house. What was that in his hands? Only a few red leaves and the shells they had gathered the day before—only one day ago! All through the night that day had given them both food for thought, and now as she saw him through the window, and as he saw her across the road, the eyes of each fell at the memories thronging close. But he came straight

to her, his face pale and earnest. Yes, the fever of the night had gone, and in its place was a steadfastness that gave her courage.

"They were not washed away?" she asked, quietly, taking the trophies in one hand and giving him the other, which he held so closely, so reassuringly, until that warm clasp forced her to raise her eyes to his.

"No, these few remained faithful; they knew you would want them this morning. How are you?"

"You see!" and she glanced at her own outlined figure on the lounge, and then: "I have not even thanked you for last night," she said, "but I do—for—all of it."

He smiled ever so slightly at that. "*You* thank *me*—ah! my dear—my dear—"

"Don't!"

"Friend," he added, as if finishing the sentence.

"That is better," she said, looking up at him. "That is how we must try to think."

Her voice was not very steady, and to the man watching her she had never looked so lovely as with that light of resolve on her face—that tremulous sweetness of the mouth that was trying so hard to conform its curves to duty, though so late.

They were alone now. Mrs. Winans and Grace had just gone for a short walk with the major, and with admonitions to take care of the invalid in their absence. Alison was left with his chair

drawn up to the window inside of which she lay. "You look troubled," he said, looking at her earnestly. "Don't be."

"I am troubled, and I deserve to be troubled," she answered, her eyes on the figures in the carpet. "You see—last night—well, I have been very miserable lately, in more ways than you know, and I suppose I am turning coward; I never used to be so—so weak, but sometimes I have wanted, so much, friendship such as yours might be if—if we could but be true to it."

"My friend!" he said, half appealingly, laying his hand on hers; but she went on, still speaking in a low, monotonous sort of way, as if trying to bar out all feeling, all light and shade from her tones.

"And last night when you were sorry for me—well, it made me weak, in a way, and I think we both forgot there would have to be to-morrows and to-morrows. But we must remember, now."

A little while they sat in silence, and then he said:

"Yes, we must remember, now. I will try to remember, or do anything you wish. I want you to be content. Try not to look troubled. Be a little glad, can't you?"

"You are very good to me; few, I think, would be so—so sympathetic toward a woman who forgot herself as I did."

"Don't speak like that—you! were you alone? Look up here!" and when the drooping face was raised he continued: "You must not grow

morbid over this, you think of it too seriously as—"

"Seriously!" she broke in with a burst of humiliation. "Am I ever likely to forget, or feel less ashamed when I—ah, how can you expect me to think of that carelessly? If I did, I should be worth altogether the worst of your thoughts."

"You will have always only the best of them," he said, earnestly; "and I should not like to think you would forget. I know I never shall."

"You may remember—yes;" she said, looking at him curiously. "But I feel as if I have helped make you lose faith a little in women—and then remembrance will be only regret."

He got up abruptly, and walked across the verandah, and then came back to her.

"I can see that no matter how unhappy they make you, the bonds of the past are things you do not think of breaking. I can say nothing to you of those. I have not been free to say even so much as I have. But I want to be your friend —if in that way I can help you to secure a little content. And when you speak of regret—oh, my dear! my dear! the only regret you can bring me is that we did not meet earlier."

There was no mistaking the truth in his tone. The sight of the half-shamed face that he had always seen so independent, and the thought of her supposed humiliation in his eyes, made him long to take her in his arms—to tell her in all fond ways how much she was to him.

"We must not speak like that to each other

again," she said, slowly; "not if we are to know each other—to try to be friends."

"And we will be," he half asked, half decided, "more earnest, helpful friends than before, because we know each other now."

"Do we?" she asked, naively. "I am not sure; you may not know me at all, even yet."

"I know you enough to be proud of you."

"But suppose I am not able to keep up to those high ideals of friendship we have spoken of so often—suppose I am again a failure?" and she smiled rather nervously. The morning was a test to her. She had had all the night to think of it—to see the truth in herself—both her strength and her weakness, and she had slighted neither.

"We will help each other." His tone of conviction left her without words for a little, and when she spoke it was as a general who gives up a field from one point and attempts a recapture from another.

"You spoke of going away—will you?"

"Not until you are able to walk, at least."

Another silence, and then—"You know something of how I have lived—I mean—alone?"

"Yes—don't speak of it if—if it is unpleasant. It must have been a great mistake."

"It was—for Mr. Holmes," she rejoined, ironically. "Oh, don't look at me as if I was jesting at something sacred—sacred! oh, God!"

And her head dropped forward on the window-ledge, and he could see that she was quivering with suppressed sobs. It was misery for him to

see her so, yet know that no words of his—that God himself could not help her except by blotting out memory.

After a while she spoke, but with her forehead still low there on the wood-work, his hand stroking her hair, with a caress in every touch of his fingers.

"And so you see life has been a very bitter thing to me sometimes. And I have needed—have wanted not sympathy so much as understanding, and now—now that it has come, I am afraid."

"You dear woman!"

"But I want you to know we must not let the time come when we can not be honest with each other."

"No, go on, what is it you want to tell me?"

"Give me your hand first—so! across my eyes, and try to understand me. There have been times in my life when friendship such as yours would have been a great temptation to me; times when I was so miserable that I was reckless. If—if those times should return—"

His fingers closed tight over her own for an instant.

"Don't be afraid," he said, slowly—earnestly; "Try to trust me a little longer, enough to prove to you that friendship is not a thing to fear. I wish I could take your weight of unhappiness and bear it for you."

"No one can—ever," she said, more composedly; the very clasp of his fingers had helped her to a

sort of strength. "I suppose, being married, I should not say such things to another man. I know I should not. But, lately, I have been so tired, so heart-sick, and when I saw that you understood it—well, I turned coward all at once, and—and I wonder how you will think of me in the future."

"As I always have thought of you; good thoughts, and I know you will deserve them."

"It is good to hear you say that, to know that you believe in me; you can not know how it helps me."

"I know how you helped me, by having faith in me even before we met. I never can repay you; let me do what little I can in return; let me be your friend."

"My friend," she repeated, raising tear-wet eyes to his face; "and if—if the time comes—"

"If the time comes when we can not be honest, and only friends—yes—I will go away."

So they spoke, clasping hands there by the window; so they thought, looking at each other with tender, earnest eyes, and in the heart of each there was the silent resolve: "I will be worthy."

Was the echo of words of yesterday dumb? Had it been stilled by the murmur of the pines, or the dip of the sea? Somewhere, it had wandered surely, and in its stead had crept a sprite akin to duty, and looking through their eyes it made them feel that the welfare of each depended on the smothering of that sense that tried to whisper warningly:

"And straightway there was no other woman, and there was no other man in the whole world to either of them, ever again."

CHAPTER X.

We boast our light; but, if we look not wisely
On the sun itself, it smites us into darkness.

The days that followed were days of sweet suggestions to those natures that had been in a way world-weary. Ah, the long, quiet talks through the days and the nights of that season! and the new trustfulness of the thing they called friendship! She was still unable to walk, and her little sitting-room became the gathering-ground for the party. And many a sketch was made, from her sofa or easy-chair, of her four friends, in the various groupings into which they would drop unconsciously, until the major vowed he could never sit comfortably lazy any more, for fear he might be ungraceful, and if he was in range of her eyes he knew his little captain would have an outline of his proportions on paper.

Other eyes than his crept into her sketch-book in those days, in the days when he, her first friend, would bring pencil and tablet, and read aloud, now and then, bits of the new work he was busy on; a half-historical romance of the old Indian government of Long Island; and ah! how delightful it was to work so, feeling so close a soul that vibrated

to every touch of feeling, to every subtle sense that to a creator of ideal work is as his own heart-beats. And then, as a guerdon for work well done, just a hand clasp—just the words: "It is good." And what an inspiration that presence was; what wild flights of fancy were led by her into realms of the imagination that had never been opened to him alone!

"You do help me. I think you are leaving the impress of your own personality on all my work," he said to her one day when, on reading over the loose sheets, he was struck by the new music of words he had written as a narration, and that half unconsciously had taken coloring from this new vein of spring-time in his blood. "You are making of me a poor poet, where before I was but a chronicler."

"Then it has all been well, there is no cause for—for regret—to you?"

He looked at her a moment. How close he had need to keep bonds on his speech, or his manner since the night of the storm, only himself knew. But, little by little, his earnest friendliness had reassured her; she seemed afraid no longer. In a way, she had convinced herself that he had been sorry for her that night. Yes, that was the foundation of his tenderness, and as for her own violent emotions, that was a memory at which she closed her eyes with a half-feeling of shame. Delicious it had been, just for that once to lie close in his arms that were so strong a shelter. Just for once to give soul for soul, through eyes

that were content to lie forever under the sea as a penalty for that sweetness of confession! Yes, it was worth all life she had ever known. But ah! the guilt of it! That ghost whose black, shadowy hand made a discord that echoed ever through the music of heart-throbs! For the first few days, she had not been able to look at him much, when speaking; her eyes would wander to the carpet, or across the meadow to the bay. But he had changed all that with his manner that was so frankly tender, so earnestly anxious to make her forget all things remorseful, by allowing her to believe that she, herself, had no serious cause for regret.

"A kiss to a friend—one who understands you—and who will be proud of it always? Do not feel humiliated because of that; the only excuse for shame would be my own unworthiness, try to remember that I feel it so, and for my sake—"

Ah, yes, the guilt was past just as the storm was, and there was nothing to fear in this new firmness of friendship that gave them both their gladness of youth, with its atmosphere of innocence. Does that understanding of hearts bring always its own lease of life to the emotions—emotions that open wide their lips as blossoms in the sun, and send their fragrance heavenward?

"Sometimes I feel a little afraid of these days—of this new, restful content—they give me a fear of a rude awakening, they are too perfect to last."

It was only the natural fear of a woman's heart

that was dazed a little with the new gifts granted it, and he smiled at the fear—teasing her about those old superstitions of hers that he supposed extended to presentiments.

"Yes, I am superstitious in some things," she acknowledged, "just little fancies of my own. And, lately—well, all the world seems changing for me. I am made to think of what may be, since nothing is as it was."

"But it is better with you?"

"Yes, it is better; it will be better. I know that, when alone again, I shall never feel as I have felt, and the 'have beens' were very miserable sometimes. You have helped me from them—from more than I could tell you."

How full of the warmth and promise of the summer air were those confidences, and how full were those hours of the grand possibilities life held for each! Together in thought, helpful in sympathy, pure in design; those were the exchanges that had grown to be their hope for the future. Their lives would be lived apart. Yes, that was an accepted fact they had never once dreamed of combating. But neither would ever again feel alone—souls and sympathies know no barriers of space, and a friendship such as that could bring no blame to their eyes, no wrong to anyone else. Sometimes he spoke to her, lately, of the girl he was to marry, and now she could ask about her as it was impossible to do before; she was his, therefore she was of interest to his friend, so they had grown to think of it. And the

story of his own faults, he told to her, of his own deficiencies, that had not yet been able to lose him the liking of the girl who had promised to be his wife. He spoke of her frankness, her gayness, as he had known her for years.

"Oh, yes, Blanche has known me for a long time, so there are no illusions to be dispelled—I do not think there ever were many on either side."

The ground for this topic was never quite safe, that is, neither felt quite at ease on it, though they tried to be so careful, lest the other would see it, and yet, simply because they were endeavoring to follow duty, they mistakenly dreamed that they were honest.

"You like Fra Lippo ever so much more than you used to, don't you, Judith?" queried Grace, complacently. "I never was quite sure, before, just how you were going to act with each other, if there was a party made up; of course you were always courteous, but both of you used to take ironical fits that were inclined to create an atmosphere. I think it was you mostly—yes, I do—you would demolish some of his loveliest ideas with a glance, or a little laugh, but now—"

"Well—now?" suggested Mrs. Winans, teasingly. "You young romancer, what new material have you found?"

"I find lots in Judith," announced Grace, frankly; "I was reading somewhere, lately, that artists must have in themselves the material for every character they create, and if Judith is an

example, I believe it. At first, seeing her on the water alone, I imagined her a sort of salt-water Amazon, with her independence and her strong arms. Then, when I knew her, she was so calmly serene, so graciously sweet; even in her irony to Fra Lippo, she was beautiful—don't listen, if you are afraid of being vain—but, since the ankle episode, I have forgotten I ever thought her only beautiful. She is so lovely now, in a soft way that—"

"Thanks, I don't mind the adjectives. Don't limit yourself," laughed Judith.

"Well, not soft," corrected Grace, reflectively, "but just lovable—yes, you are, dear. I used to admire you afar off, as I would something in marble; but now, since you've been a cripple, you've changed into something so kissable that you're a constant temptation."

"Grace, I fear for your future," said Mrs. Holmes, looking at her solemnly over a book of etchings; "for when you find that ideal lover of yours, that is to be, you will have used up all the pretty speeches, and his most ardent will seem rather second-hand affairs to you."

"Then I will teach him to coin new ones," answered the girl, with youth's assurance. "But, without joking, Judith, you really are always a sort of 'unexpected.' Now, being tied to a lounge or a chair for nearly two weeks would bring out the worst side of any other person's nature; but you—well you just sweeten like a persimmon when the frost comes."

And, during the laugh at Grace's simile, the major came, jolly and sun-burned, with the budget of mail from the office.

"There, little captain, is yours; all business envelopes. Do you never have any gossipy letters from your kind, like other women? And there is yours, Miss Grace. One from papa, and one from Tom; and here, little woman, is yours, and one of them is from 'papa,' also. This affair of chaperon is likely to be the occasion of coffee and pistols for two. And there are Alison's. He is younger than I am, and can come for them. I weigh too much to trot upstairs;" and having delivered himself of letters and opinions, he settled himself to read the *Herald*.

"Oh, Tom's a darling!" burst out Grace, in exultation. "Yes, he is, he has helped me out of such a scrape with papa, you know, a lot of bother, because I spent too much money, and papa began to look it up and ask questions, and then Tom stepped in and helped me out. It was away last spring. He needn't have made such a fuss about it now."

"No," chimed in the major, in a suspiciously sympathetic tone. "Away last spring! where did the money go, Puss?"

She smiled roguishly at him around the corner of his paper.

"I'll tell you," she said, confidentially, "because you know how it is yourself. Well, the most of it went to Blanche Athol, at the Jerome Park races."

"Um," murmured the major, looking at her quizzically, as a big mastiff would at a little lap-dog, "so you bet on the wrong horse?"

"No, I didn't. My betting was all right, but the wrong horse won."

"Well, you have a treasure in a brother that helps you out of scrapes like that," said the major, "you'd better stick to him."

"Well, I rather guess I will," answered the girl, with a sudden burst of affection. "The dear boy! After all, men know best about everything, except the things a woman knows better. That is not original," she added, as if averse to being credited with borrowed wit.

"No," said Mrs. Winans, reflectively; "it sounds familiar; who was it said that? George Eliot, was it not?"

"Yes, that grand woman!" said Mrs. Holmes, looking up from a business-looking, type-written letter.

"You admire her work so much?" asked the older woman.

"Yes, thoroughly, and more than her work—I admire the woman herself—her bravery—her truth."

"You are an enthusiast."

"Yes, I am—on that subject—what a great heart!"

"But not a model character—not just one's idea of a good woman, you know," said Mrs. Winans, rather doubtfully.

"Not just one's idea of most good women,"

assented Mrs. Holmes, "because so many of them are only passively good. But she! ah, she was one in a thousand!"

"But," remonstrated Mrs. Winans, while the major dropped his paper at the tinge of interest in their tones, "but, really, Judith, you know that, morally, she was far from perfect."

"I know she was not orthodox in her perfections; but they, none the less, existed in my eyes, and I doubt if the world's opinion of her personality touched her deeply. If so, to intercede for her, she left her work; it speaks, and will live to speak for her cleanness of soul."

"But her life was such a contradiction," said the little lady. "I do not think I am uncharitable, but I can not see in her a type to admire."

"I do, for her bravery. A woman, sensitive as she was, must have required a strong motive for setting herself outside of the world's approval. But the motive, to her, was the earnest, lasting need a human life had of her. I can think of none stronger."

"But, my dear, that may be admirable to you in the abstract, because of her work, that made amends for much. But think of it as an example, put yourself in her place, and I am sure you would have a higher code of morals as a guide."

"I'm not sure of it at all, and I don't believe I should have."

"Easy, easy, little captain!" broke in the major, "you'll get yourself in discredit, just for the sake of an argument."

"I don't think it's for the sake of the argument," answered Mrs. Holmes; "I am in earnest, and can understand the seriousness with which she changed her life for him, whether either Church or State approved; what are Church or State that they should bind or loose the affections? One's own soul is the best bondsman for one's own life. If marriage is not an evil, then neither is that mutual sacrifice of self that bound those two."

"My dear, I—really, one would think you disapproved of marriage altogether," said Mrs. Winans, a little distressed. She felt that those ideas of Judith's were not right, yet knew that the wrong ideas had been bred by that strange, unfit childhood of hers, and crowned by a mistake of union, that left little idea of sanctity in the bond. How could one combat them, or condemn the origin without blame to a loved father, or a husband whom she, herself, never voluntarily mentioned.

"No, I do not disapprove of marriage, and the conventional form that governs it. It is right for those who want their vows to be registered like that. But suppose a marriage like this one we speak of, one in which the common custom could not be followed, now why should their lives and their life-work be spoiled for lack of a form that surely has little weight with God, for, with different nations, there are different fashions in giving such vows, and none are willing to say: 'Ours is the wrong.'"

"Well, it is lucky most women do not think

like that," remarked the major, dryly, "else society would be left without much stability."

"I doubt whether God will judge souls from their standing toward society so much as from their honesty to themselves, and each other, in following the instincts He gave them when He gave them breath."

"Dear me, Judith," said Mrs. Winans, complainingly; "you are such a curious compound. Just as Grace said, 'You are always just the thing no one expects you to be.' You are advocating a theory that would shock all your sense of refinement if put into practice by those near you."

"Am I so inconsistent?" asked Mrs. Holmes. "Ah, well, my opinion makes no difference in the right or wrong of it, only I never can hear George Eliot classed among the immoral without feeling antagonistic. To me she seemed an honest, brave woman, and I think she seemed so to him."

Nothing more was said on the subject, and the conversation drifted to other topics. But, inside the window of the parlor, Alison's ears had been drawn into listening, carelessly at first, but at the finish there was a strange look in the eyes gazing so fixedly ahead of him. A mirror was opposite, and in it he for an instant saw himself as he was, and something in his face must have been an unpleasant revelation, for he jumped to his feet.

"No, by God!"

Whatever the oath was for, it did not tend to make him social, for, without going to claim his letters that lay just outside the window, he picked

up his hat, and making his exit by the back door, struck out across the fields, and their host, returning from buying vegetables back in the country, brought word he had met Mr. Alison, who said to tell his friends he was going back to the Montauk settlement, possibly to Hampton, and might not return until next day.

"Dear me," said Mrs. Winans, regretfully. "How strange he did not mention it at breakfast! Really, we have grown to seem like a little family, and one absentee breaks the circle."

"Especially if it is a Don Juan who breaks ladies' bones for the sake of carrying them, and flirts with another until her own husband scarcely ever gets a chance to say even 'How do you do' to her," grunted the major, in mock jealousy; "now I've got the three of you on my hands. Miss Grace, you will have to exist on my devotion until to-morrow, and I'll begin by beating you at poker, five-cent ante."

"You'll have to trust me for your winnings then," answered the girl; "but I do wonder what took Fra Lippo away like that, not saying a word even to me. Perhaps he has a dusky Minnehaha back there for a sweetheart, and fears my jealousy," she hazarded, complacently. "I'll get the cards. Come over here, major, where the sun won't strike us."

But the one member of the party who thought most of his abrupt leave said nothing, only all the day was long to her without the sound of his voice.

CHAPTER XI.

> Yet I feel that I shall stand
> Henceforward in thy shadow. Nevermore
> Alone upon the threshold of my door
> Of individual life.

The lame ankle was mending, and the morning after the discussion of George Eliot the invalid limped out on the verandah with the aid of the major's cane, and avowed her intention of taking a good walk before she was a week older. What a glorious morning it seemed to her! how the birds twittered in the early sunshine! how the dew diamonds glittered in the grass! and how sweet those red roses smelled as they clambered over the wall of their next door neighbor! And through all the freshness of the new day every heart-beat said: "So much nearer his coming—but a little while longer to wait."

It was friendship, so they told each other, but had either of them ever guessed before how dear a thing friendship could be? Only a few days before, in speaking of the help it had been to the work of each, he had said: "It is the *sweetest* happiness of my life." To be sure he tried to modify it a little in a later speech, and flattered himself on doing it ingeniously. But, this beautiful morning, all the modifications disappeared as vapors in the sun's warmth. All the tenderness

of his tones came back to her; all the content in his eyes as he had looked at her. Yes, he was only her friend; their bond was, they had told themselves, one without selfish ends, without passion. Theirs should be an affection such as Christ commanded when He said: "Love ye one another." All that was dross was to be set aside in their natures, so they had told this new ideal in visionary fashion, and so they had meant and hoped to be honest.

But, waiting for him through the warmth of the June morning, her want of him was very human. She watched the steamer move stately through the bay waters, and could see away down the road the tourists crossing to the village from the dock. She watched two birds pulling at a great earth worm, preparing to carry it, no doubt, to little ones at home. She tried to talk to the others, but beautiful with all promise as the morning seemed to her, yet she did not feel like talking. No, if he was here she did not think they would talk. But she knew then that the day, even in silence, would be complete.

At last, when noon was close and he had not returned, she went back to her little sitting-room.

"I will see him just as soon," she thought, and smiled at the surety of his seeking her. Some of his late work she began to read over until he came. "They are his thoughts if not himself," she said, and so tried to settle herself to content, picking out the bits for illustration, jotting down ideas for the work she intended doing for it.

Suddenly she heard a step—surely his step—in the hall below, then on the stairs, and then—no, that was not his knock, there was a strange ring to it, and she called, "Come in," wondering who it was.

The door opened and Alison entered, closing it behind him, and looking at her without moving or even speaking.

"I thought I knew both your step and your knock by this time," she said, looking up smilingly; "but I never heard you rap like that before."

"No?"

How strange that entrance and greeting seemed to her, after her dreams of the morning. Just that flash of thought came to her, and then—

"She is here—I—I came first to tell you."

"She?" Ah! how far away his face grew as in a mist! She rose to her feet saying nothing more.

"Blanche. They wrote yesterday, but I missed the word by leaving." There was silence for a little, then he said: "I—I do not know what to say to you."

How strange his face looked to her, and how white, but his words roused her.

"There is nothing to say," she answered, and her voice, very low as it was, seemed to be as strange as his face. "It is sudden, and—and that is all."

His gaze disturbed her as much as the suddenness of his announcement. He looked at her so steadily, as if all his heart was in his eyes. The

cloak of friendship was gone from his manner; but what was this sprite that had taken its place?

"They are coming—here from the hotel to see —the others; will you come down?"

She looked at him for an instant, and then tried to speak naturally. "I—I—"

"My friend."

He took a step nearer, holding out his hand to her as he spoke.

"Yes," she said, calmly, "I will come down. I am glad you came to tell me; but—but please go away now."

And loosening her hand, she turned from him, heard him touch the handle of the door, and then in another instant he had crossed the room, and his arms were about her, his head bent so low, so closely above her face.

"Try to forgive," he whispered; but the sentence, whatever it was intended to be, had its *finale* drowned by the closeness of his mouth against her cheek.

She did not speak, did not even try to look at him. One hand she raised to his as if to loosen its clasp about her, but the hand was as unruly as her heart, and was held so fondly that it left her helpless.

"Listen to me," he said, in a quiet way, still not moving, still holding her close: "I have not been honest as we hoped to be. Yesterday, I knew it. That is why I left. I came back to tell you the truth and go away. But now—"

All the contingencies to be met and battled with, all the double life to be lived under her eyes left his speech a broken fragment.

"I understand," she answered. "You can not leave now that—they have come." She heard him breathe, in a half whisper, a low, sweet title of tenderness, and it helped her to add: "Do not be afraid for me, I will be—strong. I mean you shall see how hard I will try to be—your friend."

"My friend," he echoed, as if in half-mockery of himself. "Ah, dear! my dear, if I could only be more worthy!"

CHAPTER XII.

Be it my wrong, you are from me exempt;
But wrong not that wrong with a more contempt.
COMEDY OF ERRORS.

"You are not at all what I expected to see from Dale's letters," said Miss Athol, bluntly, two days later, when, at a lunch arranged by Mrs. Winans, the new-comers were entertained in an impromptu, charming fashion. The major, Alison, and a little nephew of Blanche's had adjourned to the porch, and the ladies were left chatting over the strawberries and cake, and the tea that was served in Russian fashion.

"It is delicious," said Blanche, sipping hers slowly. "But the taste of it is always associated in my mind with dead men under the snow, and

sombre Jewish faces with sad eyes, because I first drank it so at Verestchagin's exhibition last fall."

"Those pictures must have been a great treat," said Mrs. Holmes. "I was South, so did not get to see them, much to my own regret."

"Nellie raved over them," said Blanche, designating her sister, Mrs. Julian, who, as Grace had said, was trying to act as chaperon to this specimen of contemporaneous girlhood.

"I should imagine they deserved it," remarked Mrs. Holmes, trying so hard to be interested in this girl who was to be his wife, and only ending by a wonder as to what her charm had been for him. For, dashy, beautifully dressed, and assertive, she had in her long brown eyes and her tousled blonde head a magnetism that did not communicate itself to her own sex.

"Oh, I don't know," she said, in answer to Mrs. Holmes. "They were, of course, if one wants to go into the realistic order of the artistic craze. Nellie does, you know. She would have pictures on her walls if she didn't have clothes to wear. But, for my part, those Russian things made me tired. I mean the big, weighty things. Why, they make one feel so insignificant."

"I told her it was because they had more soul in one of their painted faces than she had in her whole body," remarked Mrs. Julian, with sisterly frankness.

"Well, perhaps," assented Blanche, indifferently. "Only I did not see much to rave about,

since, in the whole collection, there was not a single face of a pretty woman."

"Are you so in love with pretty women?" asked Grace. This was a subject interesting to herself, all her romantic heroines forming extraordinary attractions in that line.

"I don't know about being in love with them," answered Blanche, coolly, her eyes glancing across her cup at Mrs. Holmes' clear-cut, softly-curved profile. "But I do like to look at them—in pictures."

"I like to look at the originals," announced Grace, with a malignant frown at the red, smiling mouth and the brown eyes. She alone had seen the glance that accompanied Blanche's speech, and, like a loyal champion, was ready for battle —perhaps incited thereto by the memory of sundry lost dollars which Blanche had pocketed with that same sort of equivocal smile.

And then, from a discussion on faces in general, and women's faces in particular, had arisen that remark of Blanche's. "No, you are not at all as I expected to see you from Dale's letters."

"No?" and she tried to speak carelessly. "I did not imagine myself of sufficient interest for description."

"Oh, yes, you were—to him," said Blanche, frankly. "He used to talk of you a great deal when you made those first illustrations—he was so charmed with your ideas and conception of the characters."

"I am very glad; it was a pleasure to do the

work," she answered, and wondered, as she spoke, how she could sit still and hear this girl's cool discussion of his thoughts and her personality.

"It was lovely work. I do not wonder he was so pleased," said Mrs. Julian. "I doubt if he could have found anyone to carry out his ideas as you did, Mrs. Holmes. We thought it wonderful, as you had no personal knowledge of each other."

"Yes," went on Blanche; "Nellie and Dale both raved about them, until Mrs. Holmes seemed a member of the family. But, gradually, Dale dropped out of the craze, that is, he kept quiet in his wondering as to who you were and what you were like. Perhaps," and she laughed a little, looking at Mrs. Holmes curiously, "perhaps because I teased him."

"Blanche!" said Mrs. Julian, with a look of irritation; but the woman discussed only glanced up calmly, her brows raised ever so slightly.

"What is it, Nellie?" asked Blanche, innocently, in an exasperatingly-unconscious manner, and then she turned again to Mrs. Holmes. "I am always saying something she disapproves of; she will tell me, when she gets me home, that I show bad taste. But, you see, I did tease him about Mrs. Holmes—it wasn't you, you know—only the name. But he had puzzled so over your personality, until, if we were out together—he and I —I was always picking out the most grotesque creatures I could see, and calling them Mrs. Holmes, and prophesying that if he ever met you he would find you looked like some of them."

"Grotesque!" said Grace, so indignantly that the rest could not help laughing at her energy, as she crossed to her paragon's chair, and leaned over the bronze head lovingly. "Well, if you want to find anything grotesque, Blanche Athol, you don't want to come to this end of the table."

"Grace!" said Mrs. Winans, in a softer copy of Mrs. Julian's tone. Evidently, from the aggressive attitude of Grace, the two chaperons were likely to have trouble with their charges.

"Oh, you little goose!" said Blanche, laughing until the tears were in her eyes; "don't be silly. I am sure I beg Mrs. Holmes' pardon, now that I know her; but none of us knew her then, so I was not treading on anyone's sensibilities—I don't dare say corns, for Nellie's looking. And do you know, Mrs. Holmes, when Dale wrote me he had been so fortunate as to meet you, he wouldn't write me a line as to how you looked, or whether my prophecies were correct, or anything; wasn't that revengeful?"

"It was just right," said Grace, promptly.

"And," continued Blanche, "when I asked him by letter, he said all sorts of lovely things about your character and your goodness. But I fully expected to find a motherly, matronly soul, with a semi-religious turn of mind—the sort that keeps tracts on their tables instead of the latest magazines. So, as I said, you were an agreeable surprise to me."

"Did you say it?" asked Mrs. Holmes in her clearest, coolest tones. "I did not hear you."

And then she turned to Grace, laughingly protesting against that young gormand having another dish of berries. And Blanche Athol, watching her lovely face with a half-attraction, half-antagonism, felt herself courteously cut.

"Who is she, anyway?" she asked, superciliously, of her *fiancé*, as he walked home with her to their hotel. "One would think her a princess *incognito* from that air she has."

"I am sorry you feel so," he answered; "I wish you could know her better; she is a woman in a thousand."

"Yes, no doubt," said Blanche, ironically; "but a woman in a thousand may mean anything. What particular part of the thousand does she belong to?"

"I think we had better not discuss Mrs. Holmes, since you take that tone," he said, quietly. "I have too high a regard for her friendship to hear her misunderstood."

"Yes?" and she glanced up at him with those long brown eyes that were so worldly-wise, despite the girlish chatter. She was rather inclined to be antagonistic that evening, no matter what the subject in hand was. She had come to the quiet little place against her will. It had been Nellie's doings, for which Blanche knew that Nellie had reasons, and she felt in her bones that she would tell Dale what the reasons were, and she was not sure how Dale would take them. To be sure, he had always been carelessly good-natured with any of her larkings in the past—of

which there had been several. She thought of that as they walked across the meadow to the village street, and stealing a questioning glance at his set mouth and his sombre eyes, she wondered if, after all, he might be rather hard to manage, despite his quiet acceptance of the past.

"To be sure, he hadn't much but the shelter of glass houses himself, in those first days," she reasoned, reflectively, "and, consequently, could not afford to spout the lesser order of things; but since he has been so painfully correct that his best friends wouldn't know him—well, there's no knowing what sort of a crank he may develop into." And then, remembering his tone in speaking of this new acquaintance that they all seemed to bow to, she felt an impish desire to tease him, beside harrowing her own awakened curiosity. She felt that she was likely to have a scene with him and Nellie before leaving the miserable little place, anyway, and with the reckless willingness to be hung for a sheep, instead of a lamb, she remarked:

"I see you haven't been wasting any time down here, from Mrs. Winans' thrilling account of your late adventure. A sprained ankle is such an interesting foundation for the dignified order of high-class friendships; a rather new style of thing for you, isn't it?"

That one cool glance, and the one cool speech from Mrs. Holmes had irritated her more than a woman usually could, and added to it Mr. Alison's words of regard that made her resentful.

She was furious at being snubbed for this clear-eyed woman, as she had been by both her sister and her *fiancé*. And he, looking at her as she spoke, wondered how he had ever been amused by this sulky little creature, or how he had found her free speech and her air of *bonhomie* so charming.

"I do not feel in the mood for jests over what might have been a serious affair to a friend," he said, in a cold, terse sort of way that told her of repressed anger. "As to my own style of friends in the past, the fact of changing them should, I think, receive a different reception from you. A weeding out of our past companionships would not be detrimental to either of us."

"I wonder what he means by that?" she thought; but aloud she said: "Speak for yourself, please; do you want to begin with me?"

They had reached the hotel by this time, and at the steps he paused.

"I think I had better not come in this evening," he said, quietly; "to-morrow you may be in a more tractable mood."

"Yes, I am likely to be," she said, ironically; "neglect is so apt to have a soothing effect on the temper."

"I have not knowingly neglected you at any time," he answered, decidedly, and stood doubtfully leaning against the porch railing. He felt guilty of much, but knew that this was only a petty accusation raised as an excuse for much that was in bad taste. But the fault to her, of which

he had been guilty, made him more patient than he could otherwise have been, feeling, as he did, that he must do what he could to make amends. She tapped her foot impatiently on the painted floor of the hotel porch.

"You were not at all glad to see me," she said at last, in a disputive way.

"As much so as you were to come, I believe," he answered, "that is, if one can trust little pitchers with big ears," referring to her little nephew, Howard Julian.

"Oh, of course, if you intend to listen to a child's chatter," she began, in a lofty tone of disdain. He looked at her as if waiting for the finished sentence, but there seemed to be no more of it.

"See here, Blanche," he said, in a conciliatory way; "it is very foolish to build up imaginary grievances of this sort. If you had let our marriage take place in the spring, as I asked you, there would have been no cause for this misunderstanding, for we should not have been separated."

But for some reason the marriage was not a thing Blanche cared to discuss.

"That is no reason why you can't come in the parlor now," she answered, in a skirmishing fashion, fighting shy of the main line.

"Certainly not," he agreed; "but try to be a little more like yourself, Blanche; something has changed you this summer."

But he followed her into the parlor, when, after

a short chat with herself and sister, he left, and walked out, out under the stars, a long way ere he thought of returning for rest or sleep.

After he had gone, Blanche turned to her sister.

"Have you told Dale anything?" she asked, abruptly.

"Anything?" in a non-commital way.

"Oh, you know what I mean; any of that nonsensical idea you got in your head about—"

"Was it so nonsensical?" asked the older woman, keenly.

"Did you tell him?" was all Blanche said.

"No, I didn't, but I will," answered Mrs. Julian, looking at her squarely; "that is, if you don't either break your engagement, or behave more as you know he would like you."

"I don't think you need trouble yourself about his wishes, when he hides himself out in those world-forgotten places, instead of coming where we were for the summer."

"You don't remember, then, your own determination for going to the other side this summer. Dale has work to do, and laid his plans accordingly. Try to have some consideration."

"Oh, dear!" said the girl, in a tired way. "I do wish you would all let me alone. Why would you persist in stopping here? Just to frighten me, I suppose. If you would only have let me be, and not nagged so at me, I never would have hunted up someone else for pastime, and now—" She stopped rather unsteadily, and after a little Nellie crossed over to her.

"Blanche, are you crying?" she asked, in slow surprise. Blanche as a Niobe was rather a rarity to her relatives.

"Well, what of it?" she retorted, rebelliously. "I wish I had never seen Dale Alison, since I am to be made miserable through him. I will go where I want to, where I won't see any of you, if—if this sort of thing goes on."

"What sort of thing?" asked Nellie, coolly, not much affected by this emotional tendency, because she felt that its origin was, for the most part, temper. But Blanche made no reply, and after a little her sister continued:

"I stopped here to give you a chance to see him, and because Ned, as your guardian, insisted on us coming this way. He likes Dale, and will not have him trifled with by you. And if it is done in the future, he says decidedly that Dale shall not be kept in ignorance of it, and that I shall not chaperon you. Now, there is the whole affair."

There was silence for a little while, and then Blanche arose and stood looking out of the window into the gathering darkness.

"So your lord and master has laid down his rules for me, has he?" she queried, ironically, with her back to Mrs. Julian; "and this is my last chance. Well, you can tell him for me that I may not need a chaperon a great while."

"You mean you are going to marry Dale this summer, after all?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. By the time Ned and

you get through with your messages of me, he may not do me the honor to want me. Good-night."

CHAPTER XIII.

And to most of us ere we go down to the grave,
Life, relenting, accords the good gift we would have;
But as though by some strange imperfection in fate,
The good gift, when it comes, comes a moment too late.
MEREDITH.

"And so we are going to Northport," said Grace to Mrs. Julian. "Judith's foot is so much better, she is sure she can make the journey all right. You see we can go all the way by steamer."

"And do you all move whenever Mrs. Holmes makes it her pleasure to do so?"

It was Blanche who asked this, and who in some way had failed to make any closer acquaintance with the subject of their discourse.

"No, we do not, though we would all be glad to," said Grace, stoutly; "we always intended going there. I am to go because the Winans are going, and papa left me in their care for six weeks yet. And Judith says she has still a month to put in at some of the nooks on the island, so she goes with us. Poor dear, we would have gone before this, but for her accident."

"And we are going to-morrow," said Howard, gleefully; "and back to Ocean Grove. I'm awfully glad; only I wish Dale would come, too, instead of

staying here and hunting up things about Indians that's nearly all dead. I like him better than—"

"There, there, never mind about your preferences," broke in Blanche, "but take that ball and your fishing-tackle out on the porch."

"So you are going—so soon?" said Alison, when the major had told him of their plans.

"Why not say, 'so late'?" Mrs. Holmes returned, smiling rather dubiously, but not looking at him. Their exchange of glances or words had been few under this new order of comradeship that had superseded the old. It was not easy for them to talk commonplaces, knowing, as they did, the state of each other's mind.

"Have the days been so hard to you?" he asked, in answer to her words. "How have you been living them?"

"Trying to think a little, and finding myself a failure, I fear."

"Come, sit down here," he said, drawing a chair up to the window of her sitting-room, where he had gone to see her on hearing she was to leave. "I want to ask you something, and am not sure how you will think of me for it, but—"

"I am not likely to have very ill thoughts of you at any time," she answered. "What is it?"

"Have you ever thought—do you ever think of getting a divorce?"

All question of her marriage had been avoided always between them. There never had been any word of the cause that had left her life so alone, and remembering the conversation that day on

the sands when he had first heard her story, he could easily understand how it would be unpleasant to speak of. But now—

It seemed as if they sat there a long time before she said: "Yes, I have thought of it. My friends have spoken to me of it. I do not think I will ever be divorced."

"Some time you may want more freedom. What then?"

"Why do you ask now?" she said, closing her eyes in a tired way. "It does not matter. Nothing matters much."

"Don't speak like that," he said, gently. "Everything matters to me that concerns you. You know that. And now, when you are going away—well, is it so strange that I should think of the future?"

"The lack of a divorce will make no difference with my future," she said, dropping her eyes under his gaze. "I will always be alone—just the same."

"And he?"

"He never wants to re-marry—thinking it was bad enough to make the mistake once. He would—would take care of me still if I would allow it. And so you can see I could make no application for divorce without doing so on grounds that—I can't speak of it to you. Don't ask me!"

She rose and stood by the window, her face turned slightly from him. But he could see she was much agitated. He reached out his hand and clasped hers earnestly. There was nothing

he could say to her, knowing that there must be memories of heart-sickness into which no one could bring words of comfort. After a little she turned round.

"What makes you have such faith in me?" she asked, abruptly, half cynically. "How do you know it is not I who am in the wrong—not he? You may be taking me too much at my own valuation. You should not be too credulous."

"You have no right to say such things of me," he said, clasping her hand a little closer, and feeling the unwilling fingers tremble in his own.

"*He* had no faith," she said, after a little; "he never believed in me, not in any woman, and through that life I grew to lose faith for so long that I wonder sometimes at you. You seem so steadfast."

"You lifted me into faith, into much that will do me good so long as I live," he answered. "You can not imagine that I shall forget."

"Will you not forget?" she asked, turning to him, suddenly. "Are you so sure you will never forget?"

"I am so sure."

"That is good to think," she said, smiling down at him rather uncertainly. "It is selfish to ask you to be unfaithful to someone else. I never really would want to think you unfaithful to anything that seemed to you duty—only—only, I would like to think that the memory of this summer's friendship will always be pleasant to you,

and helpful, as much so as I am sure it will be to me; that will not be a wrong to your—to your duties of life; surely, not when we say good-bye and go away as we are to do."

"You speak always of guarding my duties," he said, suddenly, "what of your own?"

She looked at him questioningly.

"You mean to the man I married?" she asked. He had never once heard her say, "my husband."

"Yes."

"I have none," she answered, quietly. "Oh! don't look at me like that! I can't tell you why; but I never feel that I have any duties to him. He knows it. I have told him he must never expect them again, and he does not."

"My poor friend! You must have had much unhappiness before you could come to such a decision."

"I had," she answered, her eyes touched with tears at his tenderness of manner, and then with a sudden change that was half-grotesque—"So had he; you don't ever seem to think how miserable the poor man must have been."

"For God's sake, don't talk like that," he said, jumping up and laying his hand heavily on her shoulder, "and stop laughing. I can't stand everything; I can't have you speak in that mockery of what has, I can see, been misery. I know how close that sort of mockery comes to recklessness."

The nervous laughter broke into a half-sob as she dropped her head low on her shoulder where

his hand lay, and pressing her cheek against it, she said, in a tremulous way that seemed akin to contrition:

"Yes, you know, I told you that day how much I was afraid of—of growing reckless again, afraid to trust myself. They have always thought me so cold and so strong. You alone know how much I have needed help. Ah! why did you ever come to me? or—"

"Or, why must I ever go away?" he said, finishing the question that had filled both their hearts for so many days; and then, in a quiet, dispassionate sort of way, he added, "Sometimes I have felt like saying that I will not."

"Don't!" she said, aroused suddenly to all the meaning in those words. "Don't ever say that. It is bad enough for me to be weak sometimes. You must try to be strong for us both."

She looked at him so helplessly, so appealingly, that his hand slipped from her shoulder down along the round, full arm to her fingers, which he raised to his lips.

"You are asking a hard thing of a man when you ask one to guard you from himself," he said, earnestly, "and I wonder sometimes if I am equal to it."

She tried to draw her fingers away, but his own closed over them too closely.

"No," he said, between his shut teeth, half lovingly, half grimly. "No, you can't go until I release you. Shall I, or shall I not? Ah! you beautiful thing!"

"It is not because of that," she began, and he answered:

"No, it is not because of that. But a man can not but see if he has eyes." After a little, his clasp relaxed, and when he spoke again, it was in a different tone. Each felt instinctively that his change of theme and manner was a step retraced from a cliff over which they had glanced, and that had left them a little dizzy.

"You are going to-morrow?" he asked, and she answered, "Yes, in the morning."

CHAPTER XIV.

On the northern shore of the island lies the village of Northport, where the waters of the Sound kiss with cool lips the wooded bits that cluster so close to the pebbles. Its two streets, one along the shore, and the other straight back from the water, in the narrow valley between the hills, are rather gay in the summer time, the strays from the city wandering along the shores and through the woods in search of vitality absorbed through the winter by the cobble-stones and furnace-heat.

The post-office is the rendezvous for all those aliens, and Grace was one of the habituals—she and the major generally belonging to the crowd that loafed around the door, or on the hotel porch, a few steps away, until the mail was sur-

rendered by the "bus" driver, and sorted by the official who has double work through the summer season.

Grace, for all her vein of the romantic, had a most prosaic longing for the matter-of-fact chronicles of the daily press. One of the New Yorkiest of girls, she was always eager for news of lives lived to the clang of the streets, and under the glimmer of gas-jets.

And the major was one of the men who always read the political articles first, yet never went to the polls; so he and Grace were the newspaper fiends of their little party, that had, since their last move, dwindled down to a quartette. They went for the mail together, and stumbled back along the little street, sometimes reading as they went.

"It's all we have to enliven us since we left Fra Lippo," complained Grace, when laughed at by the other ladies for her newsy appetite. "Yes, it is. Mrs. Winans acknowledges she is disconsolate without his charming attentions—he is a lonely man, Judith—oh, I know you are too independent ever to need anyone, or let yourself miss them much. But I know if it had been me he had carried in his arms, and been so anxious over, I—well I would do him the honor to regret him, at any rate."

"I am sure I do regret him; he is a very charming gentleman, a very pleasant companion."

"Oh, yes! but you say that so carelessly. You

are lovely, Judith, but in many ways you are so cool—as if nothing impressed you very deeply."

"What would you have me?" asked Mrs. Holmes, smilingly. "What you call a gusher?"

"Just imagine Judith that, can you, Mrs. Winans? No; but I know Fra Lippo was sorry to have us leave; awfully sorry; and when he went to leave the boat you didn't seem to notice how lonesome he looked, and I thought at the time that your 'Good-bye, Mr. Alison, I hope to hear your Indian article will be a success,' sounded to me just as you would say 'Good-night, Mr. Alison, I hope to hear at breakfast that you rested well.' Yes, it did; it was just as careless as that."

"Oh Grace, Grace!" laughed Mrs. Winans; "you are always putting your friends in need of an imaginary champion that you may have a chance to fill the rôle. I never thought of his being lonesome; I was selfishly thinking of ourselves; but he—I'm sure he had his sweetheart there for another day, and that would console him."

"Would it?" asked the girl, grimly, with a knowing look. "Well, if I wanted consolation for anything I wouldn't hunt up Blanche Athol as high priestess."

"Perhaps not," remarked Mrs. Holmes; "for I don't think you are fond of each other; but you see it is different with them since they are to be married."

"Are they?" queried the girl, in that same

ambiguous way. "Well, Blanche can be awfully swell if she wants to, and awfully 'taking' with men. But she seemed to have left all sweetness somewhere else this trip. She was just as aggravating as she could be to Nellie, and to Fra Lippo, too. I would like to have seen him lose his temper and box her ears the day we went yachting."

"If he had, you would have missed a piece of wedding-cake," smiled Mrs. Winans. "Think of that!"

"I wouldn't care; I'd have gone without wedding-cake for the rest of my natural life."

"That's a sweeping statement!" said Mrs. Holmes. "What about your own? Would you forego that for the sake of seeing Miss Athol's ears boxed?"

"Oh, Grace is a little schemer," said the major, slyly. "Don't you see the method in the mad desire? Boxed ears mean broken engagement—free Fra Lippo—sympathizing little girl who catches a heart in the rebound—and then—well, a prospect of wedding-cake galore, and a musical-literary partnership. How is that for a plot, eh?"

Grace only put out her lips at him and looked her scorn.

"I think he was wonderfully patient with her, anyway," she persisted.

"He understands, perhaps, that betrothal is a sort of novitiate course," said Mrs. Winans. "Husbands require much patience."

"Well, I'm sure yours doesn't," contested

Grace, whose best arguments had always personal application.

"Oh ho! don't I, though?" queried the major, lugubriously, behind his paper. "Listen to the innocent."

"The strain on your patience has no bad effect on your avoirdupois, at all events," retorted the girl, and after a little, apropos of nothing—"I think someone else is ahead of me in my scheme for that dissolution, from things little Howard was observing enough to note."

One of her listeners grew hot and cold in an instant at that significant speech. What did it mean? Had she been so blind as to show even to children the miseries she had thought so well hidden?

"What do you mean?" she asked, squarely, forgetting to be guarded, forgetting all in her desire to know just what that statement meant.

"I mean Dick Haverly," said Grace, slowly and impressively. "Oh, it's earnest; he and Blanche flirted until Nellie and Mr. Julian were furious over it. So Nellie took Blanche away from Ocean Grove until they heard Dick had gone, and then Howard said they were going back."

"Rather risky authority, let us hope," remarked Mrs. Holmes. "From what I saw of little Howard he would not be a fair judge where Miss Athol was concerned, as they were always at swords' points."

"Yes, and I rather think Miss Athol has just

enough perversity to tease her sister by a flirtation, even if it was not a particularly interesting one in other respects," said Mrs. Winans.

"Not a comfortable trait in a man's wife," added the major. "She is a dashy, sharp little thing, and I suppose Alison knows what he wants, but his friends had better say prayers for the rest of his soul on his wedding day."

And thus she had to hear him discussed day after day, and give no sign of the pain that choked her sometimes, of the longing that drew all her thoughts back to the old town on the bay, where they had walked together over the same pebbly shores, where every nook in the bends of the harbor was recorded, not by shape or shadow, but by some little word that was suggestive, by a quick glance of sympathy, or the eager reaching of a hand to help her. Ah, the sweetness and the misery of it all!

She did not hear from him. Each knew at the last—when it came to their parting—that it must be absolute, that there could never again be any pretense of platonic friendship between them. The struggle it had been to separate at all told them that.

With the conflicting emotions of woman, she honored him for his truth—though so late—to his engagement and that girl. At the same time all her heart was filled with hot, rebellious blood at the thought that he had, no doubt, gone with her back into the whirl of summer pleasures.

She tortured herself with a wonder as to what his thoughts were of this wife of another man—the wife who had given her kisses to him and who had helped him to be faithless. Could he see more clearly the vileness in her now that she could not act to him sweet lies? Did he turn gratefully to the frank creature who was to be his wife, and in the companionship that was right did he try to forget a mad dream that had led them to the feet of guilt?

She could close her eyes and seem to hear the tensity in his tones as he said, "Darling!" to feel the loving tenderness with which he drew his wife close and kissed her fondly—kisses tender and sweet, no doubt, and unmoved by that half blindness of passion that had tinged his kisses to herself. Yes, she could see it all, and the sight sickened her.

What need to imagine a Heaven or Hell when God gave to humanity—Love? It has in it the heights and the depths of each.

CHAPTER XV.

Ask me no more; thy fate and mine are sealed,
I strove against the stream, and all in vain,
Let the great river take me to the main.

TENNYSON.

The evening mail was just in, and Grace, who had got ahead of the major, carried to the cottage, down by the shore road, the budget of letters and papers. And impulsive as her manner usually

was, they were yet unprepared for her entrance that warm summer evening.

"Dear me, Grace," called Mrs. Winans, before the girl got to the gate, "don't run like that this warm evening. It is really exhausting to watch you."

"Guess what's happened!" she panted, dropping into a chair and holding an open letter in her hand. "Don't ever say I am not a prophet, guess—guess!"

"Stop it!" grumbled the major. "Give me my papers, and then prophesy to your heart's content."

"There they are—you newspaper gormand," she said, throwing him the packages, "but I'll wager none of you read much when I tell you the news."

"Well, well, tell it and ease your mind!" advised the old lady, smilingly. What great event has happened? Have you a step-mamma? or is Tom married?"

"No, but some one else is, just as I said they would be—Blanche Athol."

"Blanche Athol!" echoed Mrs. Winans, and the major really did drop his paper at the news with an emphatic "By George." But the other woman standing in the doorway only leaned heavily on the oars she held, and shut her eyes with a bitter little smile at the thought of his haste. Could he not have waited, at least until she had time to get away from the people who knew them both?

"No wonder you ran," she said, trying to speak carelessly, "a wedding is always a thing of interest, especially to one's friends; send to them for your piece of wedding-cake, my dear. I am going for a little exercise—good-bye."

And settling the oars on her shoulder, she walked down the steps and into the little boat awaiting her at the landing, at the edge of the garden.

"Did you ever see anyone quite like Judith?" said Grace, complainingly. "I wonder what news one could ever bring her that would interest her? Why, she don't seem to care at all, and such good friends as she and Fra Lippo were! Well, I'd think she would care a little on his account."

"Did she write you? How did you hear?"

"No, indeed, the letter is from Tom, just a few lines. But it all turned out just as I expected," she reiterated, triumphantly.

"Very likely," remarked Mrs. Winans. "But, so far, you have not given us a particle of information, except one bare statement; now what were your expectations? or what news does Tom send? Since you have begun, please tell us all about it."

And Grace, plunging into her discourse, forgot the exit of Mrs. Holmes, and chatting on until after sundown they scarcely noticed that she was staying out a good while. It was nothing unusual for her, however, to stay out on the water, until after dark, if she felt like it. They were used to missing her in the evenings.

But the three on the porch, chatting in the gloaming, stopped suddenly as a form coming up the village street neared their gate.

"It is—surely, it is Fra Lippo," said Grace, in a half whisper.

"That's who it is," said the major, rising and laying down his paper.

"Don't let us say anything about Tom's letter unless he speaks," suggested Grace, and Mrs. Winans nodded assent.

The next instant the major was shaking hands with Alison, and Mrs. Winans and Grace were bidding him welcome.

"Why did you not write us you were coming?" asked Grace; "we would have met you at the depot."

"I drove across the country from Bay Shore," he answered, "and did not know I was coming in time to write you. I am staying at the hotel here, but go on to New York in the morning."

No one mentioned the marriage to him, and Grace, in her romantic fashion, wondered how he could possibly be so cool and collected, and talk of everything except the one subject that must be uppermost in his mind.

After a little, he asked for Mrs. Holmes. Was she still with them? Was her ankle quite recovered? He wanted to see her before starting for New York, as he was to interview a publisher in regard to illustrations she was to make. He was to leave early in the morning and wanted to see her to-night.

"Then I guess you will have to take a boat and go after her," said the major. "Little captain is such a water-rat that she'll stay out for hours, if she feels in the humor."

"Which direction did she go?" he asked, rising to his feet. "It is still light enough to see quite a distance on water, I may find her."

"She went down that way, out toward the Sound," said Grace; "for if she had gone up I should have seen her from the porch. Come, I'll go to the boat-house with you."

A boat was soon secured. Grace looked at him, intending, in thoughtless fashion, to go with him to look for Judith, but something strange in his face made her step back.

"Really, he didn't seem to know I was there," she thought, in amazement, for he had always been so kind, so considerate of her. But she gave him a smiling good-bye and walked slowly up the steps to the house, wondering if, after all, Fra Lippo was not troubled more than she had thought at first.

A weird, steely light lay over the water, and the bits of coast in the gloaming were merely clear-cut, black outlines that looked like an exquisite etching, with, across the still water, just one pale path of rose, thrown as a last tribute from the vanished sun. The air was warm and still, not a movement to break the sweet peace of the evening, and away down around the bend of the shore, where the cliff rises up, could be seen one boat drifting idly out from shore.

Once in a while the occupant would give the oar a few dips and right the little craft, sending it in toward the beach. It did not matter much where she drifted, she thought, in a numb sort of way. A something heavy and dead seemed settling over her life, just as the gray cloak of night was blotting all the sweetness and warm colors of the day.

She had known it would come, of course, this news Grace had brought, and which she could not stay to hear discussed. But that it should be so soon had not occurred to her.

"Could he not wait until the echo of his whispers to me were dead?" she asked herself, bitterly, and then, with a burst of shivering, sobbing misery: "But they never will be! never! all the days! all the nights! oh God!"

An oar slipped out of place and drifted away slowly. The boat, unguarded, moved further and further from the beach. And huddled down there in a heap, with her head resting on the seat, lay the little captain—blind, deaf to all but those echoes of the past, that were struggling, fighting for possession of her heart.

A very weak heart, the "unco guid" may think. A wicked heart to cling so to memories that were guilty. Yes, it was all that. It was very human.

That other boat, moving closer over the still waters, gave no warning to her ears, and Alison, seeing the drifting boat and the huddled form, thought she had fallen asleep there in the warmth and rest of the falling night.

Silently, silently, he moved toward her that she might not waken; so close now that he could see the curved, white neck on which the hair rested; one more silent, sure dip of the oar and the boats almost touch. That movement of the waters aroused her, she supposed she had drifted into some of the set nets of the fishermen, and raising her eyes in a questioning way, met those of Alison's, shining with a great gladness.

"Judith!" and he reached out his hand, and even in that gesture showing his want of her.

But she only stared at him—scarcely a light of recognition in her eyes—they had been so dim with tears, now they were dazed as if by a doubt of his actuality. Everything on the stretch of water had a weird, steely glint over the grayness. In the dusk only his eyes looked warm and alive. Was he only a creation of a longing imagination?

"Judith!"

Ah, how could she mistake that tenderness for anything but his own voice? It was he. Yes, but—

"You should not have come," she said, in a deprecating way, trying to force back her own thankfulness. "You must not come again, ever."

"Must I not?" and she felt herself jarred on by that lightness of voice, that utter joyousness of manner. Where was the realization of this sickening change that had parted them? Could this be the man whose delicacy of feeling had first touched her through his work? And he could

come from the kisses of his bride to her! and come like that! She closed her eyes with a great wave of shame flushing her cheeks, though she could not have told whether it was for him or for herself.

He looked at her, smiling at her still, with that manner she could not understand. He could see the traces of tears in the eyes that had grown hollow and tired-looking in the three weeks since he had seen her.

"My friend," and he clasped her hand tenderly, "these days have not been bright ones to you either, have they?"

She shook her head. It did not seem easy to speak, she was too much afraid she would cry again, and the sobs were still trembling in her throat, making her voice uncertain.

"I know it," he said, dropping his face against her hand. "Do you imagine there was an hour that I did not think of your loneliness, your goodness in helping me to do what we thought was right? And I am glad of it now, dear—so glad; because now you will not torture yourself with regrets on my account, as I know you would have done."

Then, for the first time, she shook off the silence which his strange manner had given her.

"Have you no soul that tells you what you are doing when you come to me and speak to me like this—now?" she asked, as steadily as she could.

He looked at her in a puzzled way.

"Why not now, if ever?" he returned, doubt-

fully, "unless—unless it is because of your own bonds. I will do nothing, say nothing to influence you against them at any time, if you care to regard them. Only, after what has been, how could I help coming first to you? And I thought —she—my dear, I felt so sure you would be glad."

She laughed in a shivering way at that.

"Yes," she said, ironically, "I wonder that you did not bring your wife out here to share your gladness. Did you leave her with Grace and Mrs. Winans? If so, we—we had better go back."

In a moment he had drawn her close in his arms with a happy laugh.

"Ah! Judith, Judith!" he cried, joyously. "What is it you have been thinking of? My wife! she is in my arms. Can you not understand that? Yes, even though you send me away; even if I never see you again, you are my wife, the only one I shall ever have; dear, don't you know? don't you know?"

She threw back her head out of the reach of his lips.

"But, Miss Athol; they said—"

"Miss Athol is Miss Athol no more," he smiled; "she has been for forty-eight hours Mrs. Haverly. Now Judith, you rebel, where are your congratulations?"

Their unheeded boats were idly drifting side by side, linked close by the arms of those two people. After that war of protest against him, against her-

self, she turned her face downward on his arm and lay there passively, as if she had been waiting for that shelter, that rest. There were no words of explanation. What did it matter now of that other, or how she had fallen so readily into the idea that it was Alison's marriage Grace spoke of? That was all of the past, and their present had brought them to each other—that was enough.

"And you really came first to me—for my congratulations?" she said, with her face still turned against his sleeve, and a note of gladness, faltering through her tones, instead of the sobs. "You really came first to see me?"

"Really, and really," he smiled, in answer; "and you are glad with me, are you not? I heard it last night, but was not certain enough to come to you. Put your arm up here—so, while I tell you how long the night seemed."

"Did you want to come to me—so much?" Another weakness of the heart human, to cease its beats that it may hear every intonation in the voice of love. "And did the night seem long?"

"Did it? I can not find words to tell you of it now. I am too content only to be here. But do you remember the evening when we heard the first whip-poor-will of the season? That dream of a night! and how happy we were in our resolutions to be earnest, helpful friends; and how bright the moon was, and how sweet those roses smelt? You were only Psyche to me that night, a thing of soul. And in the midst of the sweetest

of silences we heard the call of that wood-bird. Do you remember?"

"How could I forget?"

"Well, last night, while wakeful, I heard the call of the whip-poor-will again, so clearly, so closely, it brought back to me that night when you were with me. I remembered you told me there was some superstition about the bird's call, though you would not say what it was, and last night I lay there wondering about it, fancying it must be some lover's legend that you feared to tell me, lest the subject drift us into channels we had agreed to avoid. And so, with vague fancies of the night-bird, and sweeter ones of you, I lay wakeful, waiting for morning, and hoping I could come to you."

All barriers of the spirit melted away as she heard the familiar voice, bringing back to her some of the poems of feeling they had lived through.

She raised her head, looking over his shoulder, toward the north, where the last remaining lights were centered in bars of bluish steel. The water had slowly darkened, and only a few stars shone through the warm night.

"We must go back," she said.

"Yes, we must go back;" but their fingers closed over each other a little tighter as they spoke, and then for the first time she missed the oar.

"Never mind, I will get you one instead in the morning," he said, peering into the shadows,

but not seeing it. "We can not look for it now, we can not afford to lose the time." And there was just light enough left to see the smile and the love in each other's eyes.

"Come, get into my boat," he suggested; "we can tie yours to the stern."

But for some perverse whim she refused.

"No, tie them together at the row-locks, just as they are," she answered, "and then each can row his own boat."

He protested against such an innovation in seamanship, but taking a ribbon from her hair she, with his aid, fastened them tightly together.

"That is much better," she said, complacently. "Now see how evenly we can pull on with this arrangement."

"It is abominable," he grumbled; "I shall not be able to see your face."

"You know I am close beside you, anyway."

"Yes, for this one evening."

"I am grateful for even that," she said, softly. "I have been torturing myself so with the thought of my own faults, and the certainty that you would see them so much plainer when we were parted. And then, I could fancy you classing me among women who—ah, my friend, words seem weak affairs. But the thought that I am wrong, that you so gladly came to me at once—well, only a woman who has been what I have been can know what content you have brought me."

He leaned over, clasping her arm with his disengaged hand.

"Those doubts of my earnestness must never come to you again; they are unjust."

"I believe you just now," she said, honestly; "but I am never sure how long I could continue to do so."

Their boats, tied so close, moved on over the dark waters, propelled by an oar in the hand of each. It was slow locomotion, but the night was one neither of them was in haste to leave behind.

"Where does that light in the water come from?" she asked, curiously. "There is none left in the sky."

Every dip of the oar brought a flash of faint, white fire against the blade, and sent little coils of light drifting astern.

"It is phosphorescent light," he answered. "It is on these still, warm nights that it shows brightest. Have you never seen it here?"

"I have never been along here so late before. Ah, look!—there a great ball of fire went past. How lovely, and how—how weird it makes all this darkness seem."

"That fire that passed was a fish," he said, smiling at her enthusiasm, as her oar was forgotten, and her hand thrust down again, and again, to see the tiny sparks glimmer back from her fingers. "In the shadow of that cliff ahead, it will show brightly, no doubt. It always does in the deepest darkness."

"Come, then, let us hurry," she said, picking up the oar eagerly. "Oh, this beautiful night you have brought me!"

"You have not repaid me well for it then," he answered, quietly, "since you acknowledge how little your faith in me is."

"Ah, bless you!" she burst out, with just a ring of her mother's race sounding through the caress of her tones. "Don't think that—it is not you—it is myself that am lacking. My doubt as to whether a woman like me could keep the regard of a man who knew her as you have known—"

"Why will you persist in speaking of yourself like that?" he demanded. "Woman like you! One would think, the way you say that, that you were the most guilty of women. What crimes have you committed?"

"I should be judged as guilty, socially," and he could see in the dimness that her head bent lower; "that is, if the world knew as—as you know—"

"As I know!" he said, repeating again her words. "I know nothing but that you have been very unhappy, and now are very unfortunate in caring for a man you can't trust."

The words sounded a little bitter, he felt so. Inwardly he was scarcely able to trust himself. But just then it seemed a little hard to have some one else look over his shoulder into the mirror of his conscience.

"I do not doubt your desire or your intention always to think highly of me," she answered, in a debating way. "You will if you can. I believe that. But I can not see how you can help chang-

ing your thoughts of me from what they used to be. I have dreaded that you would, and know that if you do, it will be just as it was when we cared for each other—it would be because you could not help it."

"Ah, you woman! you woman!" he breathed, half chidingly. "Why will you torture yourself with visionary fancies of what may be, when the beauty of what is lies so close to us?"

"I do not know; perhaps it is simply because I am a woman that those fears magnify themselves so, and have been real enough to make me heartsick sometimes."

"Because you are sorry?"

"Oh, I don't know; how can I define it? To say that I am sorry would mean to wish that we had never cared for each other—and I—oh, how can I ever say that? I never shall, you know I never shall!"

Her hands let the oar go and covered her face as if to hide from him, from even the darkness, the complexity of emotions that prompted that outcry. He reached across her and drew the oar into his own boat, sending a shower of silver flashing across the night as he did so. They were close to the beach in the shadow of the cliff—above them, about them, all darkness. Below them, millions of sparks floating upward. He could see her bent figure and lowered face, and a deep, broken breath told him she was crying.

A moment he sat silent, looking at her moodily,

and the next instant he had drawn the yielding, shivering form into his embrace.

Was there any word spoken, anything but that determined air of possession? Neither heard it if there were? Her sobs grew still, silenced by a mute depth of storm beside which her tears were as summer showers.

"And yet you send me from you," he whispered, after a silence fraught with more expression than any words could convey. "You, knowing all, knowing me, knowing yourself—ah, how can you!"

She loosened his arms, drawing away from the reach of his hands.

"It is because I do know you," she said, hurriedly, passionately; "and do know myself that I know this dream of happiness would prove a lie. Ah, I can see! the regret, the shame, and perhaps the avoidance of me! That would kill me, I think."

She was huddled down in the boat much as when he had found her and thought her sleeping. Her words and the despair in her voice filled him with a sweeping desire to give all his life, all his devotion to the disproving of that picture.

"You see," she went on, brokenly, "I know that no matter what evil a man's own life may have seen and known, I know how high an opinion he always has of a woman he thinks good."

"And that is why I shall always have so high an opinion of you," he answered, earnestly. "Because I know you—know you so well."

His hand that was resting on her shoulder slipped about the woman's throat, thrilling with that magnetism of touch, and drawing her face toward him.

"Dear," he whispered, "why are you so true to everything but yourself and me?"

CHAPTER XVI.

"Mail for Judith?" asked Mrs. Winans; "well, do it up in a parcel. She said we were to forward it all together to that publishing place in New York. Can you remember the address, major?"

"Yes; got it here in a note-book."

"It does seem such a contradiction of one's ideas of the fitness of things," said his wife, complainingly, evidently carrying out aloud some unexpressed thoughts—a habit about which Grace and the major teased her often. And now he looked at her quizzically over his glasses.

"As your statement stands, it does not carry much idea of your subject to your audience," he remarked, dryly. "What are you talking about?"

"Why—I told you—of Judith," said his wife, a little impatient at his density. "It does seem too bad that a woman of her tastes and her charming character—a woman who would grace a domestic home life—should live as she does the

greater part of the year, her nearest thing to a permanent address being a business firm."

"It is time she wrote us," said Grace, looking up from the little package of letters and papers. "It is three weeks since she left, and only one little note to say she was to leave New York and go South to do sketches and write up some special localities this coming winter. The South—that's definite!"

"Oh don't growl already," advised the major; "Judith has little time for gossipy letters such as most women expect. Last winter we heard from her very seldom; but she generally makes it up by spending a little of the summer where we are."

"Yes, and what a lovely time we had—Fra Lippo, and Judith, and all of us! Oh, dear, how I have missed him."

"He's much more a will-o'-the-wisp than Judith," said Mrs. Winans; "that is, I suppose so from Miss Athol's statement."

"I don't wonder he was where she was concerned," said Grace, spitefully; "I never will forgive her for acting so shabbily to him—never!"

"Don't distress yourself on his account," advised the major; "I don't think he was very hard hit."

"Now, don't be so sure of that," nodded Grace, with an air of profound knowledge. "I thought so, too, until that evening when he came here. And when I went down for the boat with him he looked—well, I just made up my mind he was all broke up; and when he bade us good-bye

the next morning, and said he didn't quite know whether he would put in the fall at the poles or in the tropics, well, I was sure of it then."

"Of course you were, you young romancer," laughed Mrs. Winans; "you will insist that your Fra Lippo is a victim of misplaced affection, just to keep him from being prosaic and commonplace."

"He never could be *that*," said Grace, loyal to her original impressions. "If he had been commonplace he never would have been Fra Lippo."

And the decision of her ideas were emphasized by the vim with which she slapped paper-covered novels into the box she was packing.

The season was almost over. A little later and the last stray from the cobble-stones would have drifted away from the green things of the woods, and the whisper of the creeping waters. The pink shells again murmur to each other their own tale of the ocean depths, and do not have their voices drowned by the harsh, hollow laughter of those ruthless giants of the summer months.

And when the day's light fades, and the sea-stars sparkle up from the shadows, only the alder and the sweet bay bend to watch them, and the flash of white fire lights no longer tragedies of soul.

CHAPTER XVII.

What I do
And what I dream, include thee, as the wine
Must taste of its own grapes.

BROWNING.

Ever drifting, drifting, drifting,
On the shifting
Currents of the restless heart.

LONGFELLOW.

Do you know a lovely old town of South Carolina that lies near to the piney woods of the Peedee? A quaint, quiet place, that lived its life before the innovation of railroads, and that echoes now through shady avenues its memories of Cornwallis and the Revolution; where the tiny ferns grow thick over the graves of the English dead, and the wide streets in their sheet of white sand give you glimpses as of new fallen snow. A place to rest; a place that the world goes by, not knowing. And in its repose began the new life of those two who had turned away from the world and its opinion—ignoring its social laws—recognizing only their duty to each other, and not fearing the judgment of God on their lives. Why should they? Did He not know? So they thought, thus they told each other through the happy days of the late autumn, an autumn that lasts there until the violets come. And so between the sea-

sons they crowd winter, with his snow wreaths, back into the North.

Ah! the work that was done through those helpful days! all the ambitions that had drifted in the minds of each for so long, were now made tangible, and possible, through their completed lives.

"God is good that he sends thoughts and work that helps people to be philosophical," she said to him, one day, after watching him as he wrote in their sunny little house close to the piney woods.

He looked up from the scribbled page, smiling across at her.

"Come here," he said, a command that was quickly obeyed, and, slipping his arm around her waist, he drew her down until she sat facing him on the arm of his chair.

"Now, what is it?" he asked, curiously. "What has given you a thankfulness for philosophy? Do you need it so much? Do you find life such a burthen?"

"You know," she said, earnestly, and drew his head close against her breast.

"Don't do that; I can't see you," he protested.

"You did not use to object," she said, quietly, but with a strange light for one moment in her eyes.

He looked at her, and, taking her hands, placed them once more about his throat.

"You must not think or speak like that, dear," he said, gently; "it is wrong. Come, tell me what prompted that speech of philosophy."

"I was thinking of you," she answered, looking past him at the yellow shimmer of November leaves seen through the window.

"Well?"

"Of how hard this isolation would be for you if you had not work that was creative—if you were not given the faculty for living in the lives of your ideals, and escaping much that would be hard for another man."

"You think it isolation?"

"I?—no, no, not for me," she said, hurriedly, her hands again gaining their caressive tendencies; "but for you, who have been used to an active life—a life in the world, of the world—very much of the world," she added, with a touch of banter in her air.

"Yes, sadly of the world," he acknowledged. "But you have been teaching me repentance for many wild wanderings."

"Are you sure you are content?" she asked, with a loving woman's persistence, the sort of persistence that is more likely to drift a man out of content than into it. If women would but think of that!

"Do I not look it?" and he smiled up at her happily.

"Yes, you do. You always seem so; but ah! my dear, I am so afraid—so afraid!"

It was the one little rift in the lute; would it ever still the music to which their lives were lived? He wondered that, sometimes, and could only hope that those fears would vanish as their

future became their past and she learned how much she was to his life.

Words were useless to her. With her woman's love she had no thought of having made any sacrifice in giving up the world's approval of her life; the world's opinion was as nothing to her compared with his. But the thought to be combated, the thought of dread was—Would the time ever come when the world's influence would force him to look at her with the world's eyes?

"Our lives are our own to spend as we choose," so they had determined, feeling that God, who knew, would not judge harshly. They would live away from the world and its pettiness of opinions. They would live useful, good lives. Ah! the dreams of philanthropy they were to put into execution when their work made their plans practicable. So they had thought and dreamed, and said over and over: "If we live true to our ideals and each other, how can regret ever come?"

Regret had not. But a super-sensitiveness had been given by Fate in exchange for the coin of their lives; and sometimes the fancies born of it would leave her filled with vague fears, and the knowledge that love could bear terrible revelations to the soul.

She was working as closely at her art work as he was at his writing in those days.

"I believe I will eventually paint," she said to him one day, when a landscape sketch in oil was

set up on the high mantel for their criticism, and to dry.

"You do paint, and paint well," he said, decidedly.

"Oh, I know I do creditable work," she returned; "but I have done little. Black and white has contented me until of late; but now I think you are making me ambitious in so much. I have felt lately my own possibilities for work in color as I never did before, only—" and she laughed a little, "I fear I shall have trouble with heads—the heads of men."

He looked at her questioningly.

"Because?"

"Because they are all sure to look at me with your eyes. Yes, they are; I tried to do an ideal head yesterday, and against my intentions the mouth smiled at me, just as—just as you are doing now.

"Now?" he asked, kissing her. But after a little she continued, reflectively:

"I seem to do no work in which there is not something of you, some little bit of your face or personality." And then she looked at him and laughed. But there was little sound of merriment in it as she said:

"In the future, when you are a respectable member of society, how will you like to be confronted by vague portraits of yourself gazing at you from second-rate canvases?"

"Hush!"

"And saying over to you the nonsense we talked as they were painted?"

"It is not nonsense. In your heart you know it is not," he said, clasping her close and lifting her face upward. "How can you hurt yourself and me by speaking so? My own—*mine!*"

"How long would you care to claim me?"

"Well—about fifty years."

"You think that?"

"I think that I think it," he said, teasingly, unwilling to encourage her in those touches of morbidness he had helped her to. But she gave him no smile in answer, only drew back from him a little.

"That sounds like—'I believe—help thou my unbelief,'" she said, and dropped down hopelessly on a chair beside him.

He leaned over her, and with all loving words and an aching heart tried to find words that would give her assurance of her sad injustice.

Thus so often a word carelessly spoken would evolve fancies and fears that all earnestness of devotion could not quite quell in her mind.

It was not regret—no, only retribution from the thing that they had ignored—the world.

The influence of its millions of souls can not be set aside by the atoms; subtly, unconsciously, they will be permeated by the sunshine, or set aside in the gloom by its silent force.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Whence camest thou?"
"From the nether hell."
"What is thy name?"
"Despair."

She grew little by little to be imbued with the idea that he was so much more necessary to her than she was to him—perhaps because she had heard so much of those past days he had lived before he knew her. Once or twice she found herself watching him curiously, and wondering if the time would ever come when she would be counted but as one of the beads in his rosary of loves.

She would be ashamed of such thoughts, and repentingly promised herself never to harbor them in her heart again. But her own humility of soul made her see that now she would be deemed unworthy by all but him, and perhaps—

And so the winter crept on, and brought with it a new fear—one over which she wept in a misery of anguish and despair through many a night—one neither of them could ignore. In their love they had thought only of each other. What did it matter that there could be no marriage ceremony when each felt the force of their mutual truth? That had been the one, the only idea of consideration.

Lately she had feared he might some day look on her with the cleared vision of the world in his eyes. But now there had come to her something so much more terrible. The madness of prophecy that whispered of how their children would look on her in the days to come.

"Ah! God! if it were only right!" he breathed, clasping her hidden face close to him, and feeling her hot tears on his hand.

It was the first acknowledgment he had ever made of any evil in their lives together.

"I think I have lost all power of judging between right and wrong," she whispered. "I know now what it is to be a wicked, wicked woman, and it is terrible."

He got up, walking to and fro in the little room where they had been so happy for so many weeks; where all their happiness stolen from the world had been knit by fate into lashes of remorse.

"I feel that I want to lie down at your feet to-night, and die there," he said, slowly, his eyes full of misery at the sight of her despair.

"Through regret?" she asked, raising her head.

He nodded, but did not speak. All the loves of the past with their flushes of earth seemed coarse to him as he looked at her so helpless—so connected in his mind with an inborn sense of purity, that despite her life had seemed untainted. To him, she was his wife, though he knew that in the eyes of the world she would never again be placed on a level with honest mothers, or innocent daughters.

For them the greatest blessing God grants to earthly love was turned into a curse, that would not even die with their deaths.

CHAPTER XIX.

Drink not together from the same cup until the last drop. For after such intoxicating draughts, the last drop is a tear of blood. SPANISH PROVERB.

What is there that could be written of that spring-time that could convey any idea of what those lives lived through between their love and their remorse? Each day binding their hearts closer, yet each day bringing clearer to them the knowledge that their future must be apart.

Across that space they moved as those lovers of Dante moved across that gray gloom of hell, hand-in-hand, an added misery evolved from the love in each other's eyes.

In May her child was born, a little soft-skinned mite, that looked at her drowsily with its father's eyes. But back of the lazy baby stare she could see what no other could—a sickening loathing, a mute reproach for the years to come.

"I can not stand it!" she moaned, piteously, even while all the mother's awakened nature longed for the baby lips, and baby fingers. "I can not—take it away."

Yet it was the gift of the God whose judgment they had not feared.

And he, its father, loving her, willing to give his life to her content, could only hear those cries of late conscience in silence—a silence that left grim lines of repression about his mouth, and the strained look of a speechless misery in his eyes.

"I wish," she said, looking up at him from a tear-wet pillow, "I wish I had been either good enough to have kept above the cause of all this that has come to us, or else that I was so bad that I should not care. If I could only be altogether bad, I should be so much happier now."

It was an echo of so much that had been in his own thoughts, an echo that sounds through all remorse for sins of commission.

"Dear," he said, gently, "you could never be wholly bad; there are four of us, you and I, the good and the bad in each, like two distinct natures."

"But over which have I had most influence?" she asked, wistfully.

"Over which?" and he dropped on his knees close to her couch. "There has been given me a clearer vision of good and evil; there are better things in my heart, in my thoughts now, than there have ever been."

"Through this lesson that has brought misery, or—"

"How slow you are to believe in yourself," he smiled, sadly, "through you, you, you."

Ah! those days of spring-time, when their longing hands lingered so at every touch, each feeling the time growing closer when their lives together

must end, a phantom in their hearts that never vanished, but of which they avoided speech.

He had talked to her of marriage, of a time in the future when it might be possible—through divorce. But to all that she had only repeated, "It is too late."

And neither her own love nor his could change that decision.

"It is too late for the child's sake," she had said, in answer to his wishes; "and for myself. Do not be vexed with me, I have grown over-sensitive and morbid, perhaps, but I know that the thought would be with me always, that you married me through pity; it would be a skeleton in our lives that would kill all content. I know it, not through you, dear, never by fault of yours, but through myself, my own love that has grown jealous of every glance from your eyes; my own sensitiveness that would make your life one of dread, and mine one of morbid imaginings. Ah, I have thought out all the truth as I lay here—I see—I know."

No plans had yet been matured for their future, or that of the child, only she was to live alone, and in some way try to live that blame would not, in time, come to the murmuring little mite, whose hands he kissed so often, and so tenderly, with sometimes a half-mad determination to keep them both always with him, despite remorse, despite fate, despite all laws.

Did the angels who guard human lives think those two souls had suffered enough? Was that

the reason that God's kiss closed the baby eyes one May morning just as the sun's rays brought in a new day? And those two, watching together its last struggle for breath, knew that its sleep was forever, its gaze would never again bring them reproach.

Only the memories—ah, the memories!

"It is over," she said, in a dull way, when they had walked in the dusk of the night back from the little mound in the burial-ground—the mound that held a buried past. "You must go back, live in the world again. This has been a season in dreamland—dreams beautiful, dreams horrible—but it must cease."

"And you?—oh, my dear, my dear!"

"Don't," she whispered, "it is late for me to speak so, I suppose, but it is right."

"I know," he answered, "it is right, and it is wrong; but to remember what is right I need you—your help always."

"You will always have it," she said, smiling wanly, "you must try to unlearn a philosophy of nature we drifted into adopting, and learn instead the philosophy of the world that tells us, while of the earth, souls must conform to its moral laws."

"I do not know—I can not think," he said, brokenly. Her hands were trembling in his clasp and he could feel that the steadiness of her voice, the determination to reason thus calmly, was costing her all the strength she had to give. That pitiful struggle touched him as no expressed emotion could have done, and with a great sob he drew

her close, and she felt hot tears following the kisses that were pressed on her face, her eyes, her mouth! Who dreams that the greatest width of loss is borne to humanity across graves in the earth? What of that coffin in which the dead stir at every pulse of the blood?—the dead whose voice will not be silenced, and whose moans drive people mad sometimes—the dead who lie in the heart?

"Ah, you are cruel," she breathed, tremblingly, drawing his head down on her shoulder with the caressing mother-touch innate in some women. "I am trying to reason clearly—at last; for I see clearly now, as I know you do, only you could not say it to me, I know; but the thought of losing you so is easier than some of the fancies that remorse brought—the thought of the time when you would grow ashamed of me, perhaps."

"And you know my love as little as that?"

"Don't speak in reproach, now," she said, half pleadingly; "I could not help my fears for the future; I can see their causes so clearly of late. They were a natural consequence of our life. No sensitive woman could rise entirely beyond them, I think, and I feel that they would have killed our happiness in the future. No devotion, no earnestness of love could ever still altogether that feeling."

"You can reason, I can not yet," he answered, in a tired way. "I can only ache—ache with the thought of what our loss of each other will mean —oh, God!—the days and the nights!"

"Hush!" she said, closing his lips with her own. "Do you think *I* do not remember? Something in this suffering has brought me to a realization of a higher life for each of us; something of the peace on our dead baby's face has given me strength to-day—lifted me out of my own earthiness."

"You are good," he said, earnestly, looking up at her; "you have always been good, and you are right now. The lack of that moral obligation has been the one blot on our lives together. It has brought us suffering, and would, I suppose, continue to do so, only I am not good like you, dear. I can not but wonder if, after all, the possession of each other is not worth any suffering life might bring."

A long time they sat silent after those words of his that had encompassed all their senses for so long. Oh! the floods of memory surging through each mind that made them clasp closer their hands in the dark of the room, where only the moon shone. Looking into his eyes as he knelt beside her, his arms about her waist, something in his face brought, as in a vision, the face of his child there instead, and something like a touch of the dead child's spirit strengthened her when she spoke.

"We have thought that so long, dear, and it seemed right for awhile; but it has all been changed by our babe's little life. All seems changed but the knowledge that we have lives left us through which we may atone. Strange

how the shuttle of fate has altered life's colors for us! You say my influence has raised your thoughts, your work to higher ideals. Dear, *so* dear! I seem to see that this renunciation will help to keep them there, while my continued life with you now would lower them—drag all our thoughts to a level from which we could never again look in our child's eyes in any after-life. It has come to me slowly, this understanding, but it will never leave me again."

Was his own spirit touched by that subtle, unseen presence they had brought earthward? Something stilled that mad passion of protest, as he drew her face to his and kissed the pure, sad eyes with a feeling akin to that with which he had kissed their child in its coffin only a few hours before.

"If I dare pray for anything after my wrongs to you," he said, screening his face with her hands, "it will be that I can live so as to help you—in all highest desires—"

The sweetness of ideal hopes that ever rises afresh from under the trampling feet of humanity!

And the clasp of their hands was the silent register of that prayer that each felt was a promise. What matter though their past had shown them what brittle things human intents were? This was a new present. After a little, she said, reflectively: "When we are apart, do not think of me as wholly despairing. Work brings its own blessings, and I have work to do—work of atone-

ment. I am not despairing to-night. I am happier than I could think possible. That seems strange to say, loving you as I do. It is not really happiness either—only a sense of peace. Do you understand?"

"Yes—I know. May it always be with you."

To them both it was the first fragrance from the flowers of sacrifice to duty—the fruit of which is garnered for humanity on the other side of death.

"Of the divinity of that book called Holy," she said, after a little while, in a reflective way, "I used to doubt. I never was quite sure. But I do know that the violation of those commandments to humanity bring with them their own punishment. Life has proved for us that the foundation for work that will honor God and each other can only be reached through this atonement."

After a moment of silence, she added: "Dear, it is not to your heart I speak now."

"I know," he said, sadly, earnestly. "It is the soul to the soul drawn close to your own and our child's, until I see as you see, and know for a truth that no love of earth, no singleness of heart, or purity of intent can make amends for the breaking of God's laws. Those who dream of it will awaken to the same knowledge."

Thus two souls parted there in that old town of the South—two souls that had helped each other to all joy, to all pain, to all high resolves, during one sweet, short year of life.

And as a monument to their past, a little mound is nestled among the fragrance of the pine-needles, and above it a tiny tablet bearing no name, only the one word—"Galeed."

EPILOGUE.

"Well?" said the writer of "Galeed," turning to Harvey, as the Poet, reading the story to them, ceased at the shadowy scene of the parting—"Well?"

"Good," answered the publisher, decidedly. "It is peculiar enough to find many enemies, and you are about the last man I should have expected that sort of a story from, but I want it."

"I do not think I shall care so much for the enemies it meets," said the writer, thoughtfully, "if only now and then it may fall into the hands of some woman and take with it a lesson."

"To women alone?" asked the Poet.

"No, not to women alone. But—women suffer most."

And with that final remark on "Galeed," he picked up the craniological romance as if to drop the subject of his own.

"Pretty little thing," was the Professor's criticism on "The Lady of the Garden," as he looked over his spectacles at the most youthful of the trio; "pretty; but your old woman has too much

poetry in her for an herb-gatherer—not natural, at all."

"Hunt up some other point for criticism, can't you," remarked the Bohemian, "especially after the poetical soul you have managed to fasten to those pages. And then, who can say what is, or is not a natural character, since people so constantly meet with surprises in themselves, under different influences. We never quite know our own nature until someone else helps us understand it. So many things that may be true of us are yet not natural to us, so who can draw the line? To you, who are practically doubtful of most things, that old woman may have shown but the commonplace side of her nature, while this other fellow, Aberdeen, may have, by the force of his own sympathy or personality, made possible the telling of her story in a manner unusual."

"No argument in it, either," continued the Professor. "It is easier to idealize a man after he has been buried a few years than it would be to live with him during that time. Perhaps the flowers were a peace-offering for the curtain lectures she had given him while living."

"Just be a little lenient to my first attempt," suggested the young author, "Here's Mr. Allan; he will not be so sensitive; pick him to pieces."

"No. I'll leave that for the professional critics, it's too ultra-emotional for me to puzzle my brain over; the man in it has so many fine theories on the sublimity and beauty in friendship, at the same time that he is sweeping it out of existence.

He is always thinking and talking of high ideals of life and use, but in every attempt to reach them he stumbles back to the foot of the figurative ladder."

"I fear many of us stumble in the same attempt," was the comment of the Poet.

"And as for the woman, she strikes me as being one of those people who are never happy unless they are miserable, made up of spasmodical fits of rapture and agony, and preferring it to commonplace, uneventful content. I've no doubt if her husband had been introduced, he would have proved a good sort of a fellow, with his nervous system a wreck. But those two characters blindfold each other, morally, all through the story, and then wonder that they can't see. They make a plaything of fire, and let their chronicler moralize over their burns. It is not an unusual story."

"But unusual to be told," interrupted the Poet, turning champion for the Bohemian, who listened in silence to the comments.

"And it has no plot—"

"Neither have lives, only plans; but the plans are written of God, so one has a precedent for plotless stories. But what of your own, Professor?"

"Oh, well, mine does not pretend to be literary; but there's an argument in it, anyway."

"And a lesson in 'Galeed'—imagine the perfection of their lives if their bond had not been what we call sin."

"Humph! the chances are that they would not have been nearly so attractive to each other. The barriers raised enhanced the value of the thing suffered for. The same rule holds good in religious fanatics—give a tinge of oppression to their sect and straightway they will march to martyrdom for it."

"Ah! then you really class love as a religion?"

"No—not at all—merely a figure of speech."

"Don't you think, for a man who agreed to leave criticism to the critics, you are raising a good many objections?" remarked Harvey, turning from the manuscript of "Galeed." "Not to the style or calibre of work, but simply with the people, because you do not happen to know them. Though they may not be your sort, they will serve as a foil to your 'Romaunt,' so don't quarrel with them."

"Then you really think well enough of them to publish them together?" asked the Poet; "mine, too?"

"Yours, too, my modest friend," said Harvey, showing in his voice the liking he had formed for the young fellow. "And another one from you when you can do it—something less pastoral next time. You and Allan might form a literary partnership; how is that for a scheme? I will be your publisher."

"We must have Professor, also," said the Bohemian.

"No, you will not have Professor, either," said that individual; "I've told my last love story."

"Tell some other sort of a story, then," suggested the Poet.

"I think not. In all the jabber over the three of these, I have not yet heard a word as to the theories we started to prove."

"Never mind," grinned Harvey; "you've pulled each other to pieces enough without starting on that tack. Leave that for the public."

"Harvey," said the author of "Galeed," with a sudden flash of memory, "what about that incomparable specimen of womanhood to whom you were so devoted when we began these stories? Has the attachment that existed then been declared unending by this time?"

"Oh, yes," he said, briskly, raking around on his desk until he found two cards fastened with white satin, which he dangled aloft on a cigar-holder; "*hers* has, two weeks ago—to another fellow! Oh, I see you chuckling, Professor; but that was not a love story, only an episode. By the way," he added, shoving the manuscripts into a drawer, "in going over these stories—colored as they are with the personalities of all three of you as I know you—I have been asking myself a question that is not likely to occur to your other readers: In these wanderings 'In Love's Domains' how much of these chronicles is imaginary and how much is history?"

Do you think he was told?

[THE END.]